



The Hennepin County Aging Initiative

Research highlights: Elder abuse and neglect

Protected and safe

People are safe from harm through prevention, early intervention and treatment services, and through enhanced public safety. Protected and safe is a goal Hennepin County has for all its residents.

Top research findings

The following summary highlights key findings from the research about elder abuse and neglect. A detailed discussion of the following nine items is included in the complete report attached to this summary.

1. Elder abuse and neglect is not uncommon. More than 11 percent of adults age 60 years and older responding to the 2009 National Elder Mistreatment Study – the most recent nationally representative study of elder abuse and neglect in the United States – said they had experienced physical, emotional, sexual abuse or potential neglect within the year before the study. Also, 5.2 percent said a family member was currently financially exploiting them. A majority of these incidents were not reported to authorities. The percent of incidents reported in the National Elder Mistreatment Study ranged from just 8 percent of emotional mistreatment episodes to 31 percent of physical mistreatment incidents. One study of adults age 65 and older in Boston found that as few as 1 in 14 cases of physical abuse, verbal aggression or neglect were reported.
2. The majority of elder abuse and neglect incidents take place in the community. Almost 90 percent of substantiated reports in 13 states providing data for the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services involved cases in which the elder abuse happened in domestic settings, about 6.2 percent took place in long-term care settings and 1.8 percent of substantiated reports were about events that took place in other locations such as hotels or motels, the workplace and assisted living facilities.
3. Reports of elder abuse and neglect to Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies are on the rise, with financial exploitation and neglect playing a central role in the growing number of calls. The United States Government Accountability Office determined that APS investigations may increase 28 percent by 2020 and 50 percent by 2030, based on projected population growth among older adults in 33 states providing investigation data in a 2010 survey.
4. At the same time reports to Adult Protective Services agencies are on the rise, cases are becoming more complex and challenging to resolve, often involving several forms of elder abuse, multiple perpetrators, intellectual disabilities, diminished cognition and substance abuse on the part of the victim or perpetrator. APS budgets are not keeping pace and are creating problems for programs with increasing caseloads and the need to provide continuing case management.

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5. The perpetrators of elder abuse and neglect are rarely strangers to their older adult victims. Children, spouses or partners, and other relatives account for many elder abuse incidents, with various studies finding that they are the perpetrators in somewhere between 4 and 10 to more than two-thirds of all elder abuse and neglect events. One study found that family members were the perpetrators in 9 out of 10 substantiated incidents of domestic elder abuse and neglect. Friends and acquaintances are also responsible, but to a lesser extent.
 6. Early research focusing on the causes of elder abuse and neglect highlighted caregiver stress, in which overstressed caregivers strike out neglecting or harming an older adult, and the cycle of violence – in which children who are mistreating their parents do so because they were abused as kids. More recent research has largely discounted these theories and found that aspects of the caregiver’s personality and the quality of the relationship between the caregiver and older adult are more closely associated with an increased risk of abusive behavior, including mental health problems, substance abuse issues, social isolation and dependency on the older adult victim.
 7. There is some evidence that adults older than 80 years and women are at greater risk of elder abuse and neglect but it is inconclusive.
- Even though white older adults are the subject of the majority of elder abuse and neglect reports, researchers have found that black older adults are overrepresented in comparison to their percentage of the older adult population in neglect, financial exploitation, and emotional abuse incidents. Hispanic older adults and older adults of other races and ethnicities are underrepresented among victims of all types of mistreatment. The 2009 National Elder Mistreatment Study also found that lower income – less than \$35,000 per year – was associated with neglect, and a prior traumatic experience put older adults at increased risk of emotional, sexual and stranger-perpetrated financial mistreatment.
8. Among the risk factors for elder abuse and neglect are physical and cognitive impairment, and mental health problems. However, there is disagreement among researchers about the role that a victim’s physical health status plays in elder abuse and neglect. Cognitively-impaired older adults may be among those most at risk of abuse because they are unable to defend themselves from, or perhaps even recognize, that abuse or neglect are taking place. Shared living situations appear to protect older adults from financial mistreatment but also put them at greater risk of other forms of elder abuse and neglect. Social support plays a key role in protecting older adults from and reducing their risk of almost all forms of elder abuse and neglect.
 9. Studies have linked elder abuse and neglect with shorter longevity. A 2009 study of Chicago residents age 65 and older found that confirmed elder abuse significantly increased older adults’ risk of mortality by more than two times at one-year follow up. Older adults with confirmed cases of self-neglect had almost six times greater risk of mortality. Even in instances in which death does not occur as a result of elder abuse and neglect incidents, victims may lose the ability to live independently due to decreased physical abilities. Investigators examining the link between Adult Protective Services intervention and nursing home placement found that the strongest risk factor for nursing home placement was APS referral for self neglect. In addition, older adults who are victims of elder abuse and neglect lose time they otherwise could have spent doing something else if not for the victimization, and suffer financial losses. Older adults on fixed incomes experience more harm from these financial losses than younger victims because they have less time and ability to rebuild their assets through working.

Elder abuse definitions

Obtaining a clear understanding of an event, and how often it occurs, requires a clear and consistent definition. One of the obstacles to better understanding elder abuse and neglect – and a major impediment to collecting uniform data about elder mistreatment nationally – are its many different definitions.¹ Some agreement is beginning to emerge about a definition of elder abuse that includes two primary concepts: that an older adult has experienced injury, deprivation, or unnecessary danger, and that there are specific individuals who are responsible for causing or failing to prevent it.²

The U.S. Administration on Aging's National Center for Elder Abuse serves as a national resource center dedicated to the prevention of elder mistreatment. The center has identified six major types of elder abuse and neglect.³

U.S. Administration on Aging National Center for Elder Abuse

Types of Elder Abuse	Definition
Physical abuse	Use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment.
Sexual abuse	Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an older adult.
Emotional or psychological abuse	The infliction of anguish, pain or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts.
Financial abuse or material exploitation	The illegal or improper use of older adults' funds, property or assets.
Neglect	The refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person's obligations or duties to an older adult.
Self-neglect	The behavior of older adults that threaten their own health and safety.

Source: NCEA, 2011

Although the NCEA includes self-neglect as a type of elder abuse, there is disagreement about whether it should be considered a form of elder abuse because it differs from the other forms of abuse in many ways – not the least of which is that the abuser is also the victim.⁴ Identifying neglect is challenging because it represents the absence of action, rather than explicit engagement in abusive behavior.⁵

Elder abuse and neglect: Studies of incidence and prevalence

Many studies have attempted to determine the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse in the community. However, the available information cannot be used to track trends in elder abuse because each study used different methods to arrive at their prevalence estimates. That being said, the existing research shows that elder abuse and neglect is not uncommon.

- Pillemer and Finkelhor surveyed more than 2,000 older adults in the Boston metropolitan area and found that 3.2 percent had experienced physical abuse, verbal aggression, or neglect since reaching age 65, but did not include financial exploitation and self-neglect in the study. About 1 in 14 cases were reported to authorities.⁶
- In the National Elder Mistreatment Study, 11.4 percent of respondents age 60 years and older said they had experienced physical, emotional, sexual abuse or potential neglect – defined as neglect in which a need has been identified but there may be no one available to help meet the need – within the year before

the study.⁷ About 1 percent of respondents reported experiencing two or more forms of mistreatment and 0.2 percent reported three forms of mistreatment in the past year.⁸

- National Elder Abuse Incidence Study researchers estimated that about 450,000 older adults age 60 and older experienced abuse or neglect in 1996. When older adults experiencing self-neglect were included, that estimate jumped to more than 551,000. The study also found that more than five times as many new incidents of elder abuse and neglect – and almost four times as many new incidents of elder abuse, neglect or self-neglect -- went unreported as those that were reported and substantiated by Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies in 1996.⁹
- The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services examined 2003 APS data pertaining to reports of abuse for individuals 60 years of age and older for all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia and Guam. The survey found an abuse reporting rate of 8.3 reports for every 1,000 persons over the age of 60. Minnesota's abuse reporting rate was a bit higher at 10.72 reports per 1,000 persons.¹⁰

Studies have also examined the prevalence of elder abuse and neglect by type. Almost 5 percent of adults age 60 and over responding to the National Elder Mistreatment Study said they had been emotionally mistreated within the year before the study, but only about 8 percent of these incidents were reported to police.¹¹ In

a 2008 study, 9 percent of individuals aged 57 to 85 said a family member had verbally mistreated them within the year before the study.¹² In the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services, data supplied by 19 states showed that 14.8 percent of substantiated reports in 2003 related to verbal abuse.¹³

Physical mistreatment takes place less often but is more likely to be reported to authorities. The National Elder Mistreatment Study found that 1.6 percent of older adults age 60 and over had experienced physical mistreatment within the year before the study and 31 percent of these events were reported to police.¹⁴ Just 0.2 percent of individuals aged 57 to 85 said a family member had physically mistreated them within the year before the study in a 2008 study.¹⁵ Substantiated report information collected for the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services indicated 10.7 percent had to do with physical abuse.¹⁶

National Elder Mistreatment Study researchers found that financial exploitation of older adults was, "unexpectedly common." In the National Elder Mistreatment Study, 5.2 percent of adults age 60 and older reported that they were currently experiencing financial exploitation by a family member. In addition, 6.5 percent of older adults reported that strangers had financially mistreated them at some point in time over the course of their lifetime.¹⁷ Among respondents aged 57 to 85 in a 2008 study, 3.5 percent said a family member had financially mistreated them within the year before the study.¹⁸ Almost 15 percent of substantiated reports from 19 states in the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective

Services concerned financial exploitation.¹⁹

Sexual mistreatment was less prevalent with 0.6 percent of adults age 60 and over reporting it in the National Elder Mistreatment Study. Sixteen percent of these assaults were reported to police.²⁰ The 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services also reflected a smaller number of substantiated reports for sexual abuse, with just 1 percent pertaining to this type of mistreatment.²¹

More than 5 percent of adults age 60 and older said they had needs in the year prior to the study but no one to help them meet them, which was defined as potential neglect in the National Elder Mistreatment Study. Caregiver neglect was cited by 0.5 percent of respondents.²² More than 50 percent of substantiated reports from 19 states in the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services concerned self-neglect (37.2 percent) or caregiver neglect (20.4 percent).²³

The majority of elder abuse and neglect incidents take place in the community. In the 13 states able to provide this data for the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services, almost 90 percent of substantiated reports involved cases in which the elder abuse happened in domestic settings, about 6.2 percent took place in long-term care settings, and 1.8 percent of substantiated reports were about events that took place in other locations, including hotels or motels, the workplace and assisted living facilities.²⁴

Many incidents of elder abuse and neglect may go unreported because they involve persons in intimate and family relationships

who do not wish to publically discuss private matters, who may fear retaliation, who do not know to whom to report, or who deny they are being mistreated.²⁵ Older adults may be reluctant to report family abuse because they are embarrassed that their spouse or child violated their trust.²⁶ Also, older adults may fear that if they report the mistreatment, a friend or family member may go to jail and they may lose the ability to live in their own home and be institutionalized.²⁷

Reports of elder abuse and neglect to Adult Protective Services

In most states, Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies are the first call for help for those who suspect elder abuse and neglect.²⁸ Adult Protective Services agencies are responsible for receiving reports of alleged elder abuse, investigating allegations and substantiating cases of elder abuse and neglect, and arranging for services to protect victims.²⁹

The number cases reported to Adult Protective Services agencies represent just the "tip of the iceberg."³⁰ Studies, such as the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, that compare the number of incidents reported to Adult Protective Services to those reported to law enforcement agencies, hospitals, elder care providers, and financial institutions have found that official APS statistics capture a small percentage of mistreatment and neglect episodes.³¹

Reports of elder abuse and neglect to Adult Protective

Services agencies are on the rise:³²

- In 1986, the first year a national estimate of domestic elder abuse reports was calculated, there were 117,000 reports. By 1996, that number had grown 150 percent to 293,000 reports.³³
- In the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services, researchers determined there were 381,430 reports of elder abuse to APS in the United States in 2003, an increase of 30 percent from 1996.³⁴
- In a 2010 survey of state units on aging, 24 states and the District of Columbia reported increased calls for Adult Protective Services in state fiscal year 2010. All 24 states named financial exploitation as a cause of the increased calls. Nineteen states plus the District of Columbia reported that neglect was a factor in the increased calls and most of these calls concerned self-neglect.³⁵
- Thirty-three states were able to provide the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) with information about adult protective services investigations in a survey conducted in 2010. APS conducted 292,000 investigations of elder abuse in state fiscal year 2009 in these 33 states. Based on projected population growth among older adults, the GAO determined that APS elder abuse investigations in these states may increase 28 percent by 2020 and 50 percent by 2030. Minnesota was one of the 33 states that were able to provide the GAO with elder abuse investigation data.³⁶

Not only are the number of reports to Adult Protective

Services agencies on the rise, but APS officials say that cases are becoming more complex and more challenging to investigate and resolve. APS program officials and subject matter experts told the GAO that cases are more frequently involving several forms of elder abuse, multiple perpetrators, intellectual disabilities, diminished cognition and substance abuse on the part of the victim or perpetrator. Program officials and subject matter experts observed that older adults are living longer, which increases the likelihood that they may experience cognitive or physical disabilities. These characteristics make cases more complex and in need of expanded APS interventions. Many cases may also require additional post-investigative services. Twenty-two states in the GAO study reported that providing continuing case management after investigations are complete pose a very great or great challenge.³⁷

At the same time reports are on the rise and cases are increasing in complexity, funding is not keeping pace. In the GAO survey, 25 of 38 states that provided funding data indicated that total APS funding received from all sources stayed the same or decreased over the past five years, and program officials ranked insufficient funding for program operations as the most significant challenge they face.³⁸

Flat or decreasing budgets are creating problems for APS programs with increasing case-loads. Thirty-three states told the GAO that there have been freezes in hiring APS caseworkers in the past year and 25 states said that APS staff had been subject to furloughs. Ad-

ditionally, APS program officials told the GAO that when funding decreases, caseworker training is often reduced or eliminated.³⁹

In 19 of 28 states able to provide information about funding sources to the GAO, more than half of the APS budget in fiscal year 2009 came from state and local revenues. In five states, the entire APS budget came from state and local revenues. The majority of federal support for APS comes in the form of Social Services Block Grants (SSBG), which states may choose whether or not to use for APS.⁴⁰

Public awareness of elder abuse and neglect plays an important role in preventing it. However, APS program officials told the GAO they do not have the resources to develop and implement public awareness campaigns.⁴¹

Perpetrators of elder abuse and neglect

Perpetrators of elder abuse and neglect are rarely strangers to their older adult victims. Various studies have found that children, spouses or partners, and other relatives account for somewhere between 4-in-10 to more than two-thirds of all elder abuse and neglect events, depending on the type of mistreatment.

In Pillemer and Finkelhor's study of older adults in Boston, spouses were responsible for the majority of abuse incidents (58 percent) but adult children were also named as those responsible (24 percent).⁴² National Elder Abuse Incidence Study researchers found that

family members were the perpetrators in almost 9 out of 10 substantiated incidents of domestic elder abuse and neglect, with adult children the most likely perpetrators of substantiated mistreatment (47.3 percent). Spouses were the second largest group of perpetrators (19.3 percent).⁴³

Eleven states were able to provide information about the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim in the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services. In almost a third (32.6 percent) of substantiated cases, the relationship between perpetrator and victim was that of an adult child, in 21.5 percent of these cases the alleged perpetrator was listed as other family member and in 11.3 percent of the cases the alleged perpetrator was a spouse or intimate partner.⁴⁴

More than 40 percent of older adults aged 57 to 85 named their spouses or romantic partners, and children as those responsible for physical, verbal and financial mistreatment in the past year in a 2008 study. However respondents also identified ex-spouses, in-laws, and siblings. Siblings were the second most commonly mentioned family members responsible for financial mistreatment after children. More than a third of respondents said friends, neighbors, coworkers and bosses were responsible for verbal mistreatment. Friends were identified by 10 percent of respondents as those responsible for financial mistreatment.⁴⁵

In looking at the perpetrators of mistreatment by type of mistreatment, the National Elder Mistreatment Study found that partners or spouses, and children and grandchildren

accounted for 44 percent of recent episodes of emotional mistreatment, other relatives accounted for 13 percent and acquaintances for a quarter of incidents. Strangers accounted for 9 percent.⁴⁶

Adults age 60 years and older participating in the National Elder Mistreatment Study said that their romantic partners and spouses, and children were responsible for more than two-thirds of recent physical mistreatment events, other relatives for 9 percent and acquaintances for 19 percent. Just 3 percent of perpetrators were strangers.⁴⁷

Partners and spouses, other relatives and acquaintances were the perpetrators in 92 percent of the recent sexual assault incidents reported by Mistreatment Study respondents. Strangers accounted for 3 percent.⁴⁸

Perpetrators of caregiver neglect are those individuals identified as having some responsibility for helping an older adult meet their needs. In the National Elder Mistreatment Study, partners were considered the negligent parties in 28 percent of identified cases, children and grandchildren in 39 percent of the cases, and acquaintances in 23 percent of cases. However, the researchers note that the sample size for cases of neglect by an identified caregiver was extremely small (n=27).⁴⁹

Reasons that elder abuse and neglect takes place

Some have suggested that children who mistreat their parents do so because they were abused as children. The cycle of violence has been used to describe the process by which abused kids become abusers in later life. It would make sense that if violence in childhood causes individuals to become violent as adults, then perhaps child victims of abuse would retaliate by mistreating their parents later on.⁵⁰ Korbin, Anetzberger, and Austin (1995, as cited in Payne) tested the cycle of violence hypothesis and found that the intergenerational transmission of family violence applies to child abuse but not elder abuse. The researchers concluded that kids who are beaten are likely to become adults who beat their kids but do not tend to become adults who beat their parents.⁵¹

Although the cycle of violence may not translate from child to parent, other researchers note that among spouses, a history of violence in the marriage may be predictive of elder abuse in later life.⁵²

Caregiver stress is a commonly cited reason for elder mistreatment.⁵³ According to this theory, well-intentioned caregivers are so overstressed by the burden of caring for dependent older adults that they lose patience and strike out, neglecting or otherwise harming the older adult. However, Pillemer (1986, as cited in Payne) found that offenders are more likely to be dependent on the victim and they commit abuse to gain some sort of control.⁵⁴ Other research-

ers concur. Abuse has been found to result, in some cases, from attempts by dependent relatives – particularly adult offspring – to obtain resources from the victim. Tense and hostile family relationships may persist because a financially dependent son or daughter is unwilling to leave and lose their parent's support.⁵⁵ Other researchers also point to abusers' dependency on their victims, primarily for financial support and especially for housing, as a reason for elder abuse.⁵⁶

Gainey and Payne also disputed the caregiver stress theory in a study of caregiver burden among those caring for older adults with and without Alzheimer's Disease. The researchers found that caregiver burden was not a primary cause of abuse in Alzheimer's cases anymore than it was in other kinds of elder abuse cases. They concluded that the caregiver stress explanation for elder abuse and neglect is an, "oversimplification," in that a lot of individuals experience stress but not everyone commits abuse as a result of the stress.⁵⁷

Five other studies completed in the late 1980s and early 1990s cast further doubt on the caregiver stress model of elder abuse and neglect, finding instead that it is the dysfunctional nature of the relationship between the older adult and the caregiver, and the way family members interact, that is the most predictive factor affecting the quality of caregiving and the feelings of burden.⁵⁸ One elder abuse and neglect researcher referred to the caregiver stress theory of elder abuse and neglect as the, "myth that won't die."⁵⁹

National Elder Mistreatment Study researchers found that relative to the general population, perpetrators of emotional, physical, and sexual mistreatment have high unemployment, increased substance abuse, and increased likelihood of mental health problems.⁶⁰ Several studies have confirmed many of the Elder Mistreatment Study's findings. A number of studies have established that a history of mental illness is more common among those who commit elder abuse than in the general population, with depression found frequently among those who abuse older adults. In addition, alcohol misuse has been found to function as a risk factor.⁶¹ Pillemer (1986 as cited in Payne) also found that abusers had emotional problems and problems with alcohol dependence.⁶²

In about half of all the cases in which perpetrators were known in the National Elder Mistreatment Study, the perpetrators of mistreatment were socially isolated, having fewer than three friends.⁶³ A review of 21 studies by the National Center on Elder Abuse in 2005 found that elder abuse perpetrators often lack social support and are likely to have problems with relationships.⁶⁴

Demographic factors and elder abuse and neglect

There is some evidence that adults older than 80 years and women are at greater risk of elder abuse and neglect but it is inconclusive.

The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study found that adults older than 80 years were far more likely to be the victims of all categories of abuse.⁶⁵ Older age also played a role in the 2004 Survey of Adult Protective Services. Among 20 states with victim data broken down by age, 20.8 percent of victims were between the ages of 60 and 69, 36.5 percent were 70 to 79 years, and 42.8 percent were 80 years of age and older.⁶⁶ National Elder Mistreatment Study findings differed. Lower age, between 60 and 70 years, was associated with an increased risk of physical, emotional and stranger-perpetrated financial mistreatment but was not related to an increased or decreased risk of sexual abuse, financial mistreatment by family members or neglect.⁶⁷

In the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, women were more likely to be the victims of all categories of elder abuse, with the exception of abandonment, for which 62.2 percent were men.⁶⁸ In the 2004 Survey of State Adult Protective Services, data from 15 states showed that women were the victims in two-thirds, 65.7 percent, of substantiated mistreatment cases.⁶⁹ In a 2008 survey of older adults aged 57 to 85, women were about twice as likely as men to report verbal mistreatment but did not differ in the odds of reporting financial

mistreatment.⁷⁰ The National Elder Mistreatment Study's findings departed from those of previous work in that gender was not found to be associated with an increased risk of any form of mistreatment when controlling for other risk factors.⁷¹

Even though white older adults continue to be the subject of the majority of elder abuse and neglect reports, the research suggests that black older adults are overrepresented in comparison to their percentage of the older adult population for certain types of mistreatment. Hispanic older adults and older adults of other races and ethnicities appear to be underrepresented.

White older adults were the victims in 8 out of 10 reports for most types of mistreatment in the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study.⁷² However, black older adults were overrepresented in relation to their percentage of the older adult population in neglect, financial exploitation, and emotional abuse incidents. Hispanic older adults and those from other racial and ethnic groups were underrepresented among victims in all types of mistreatment.⁷³ In a 2008 survey of older adults aged 57 to 85, African Americans were much more likely to report financial mistreatment but no more likely to report verbal mistreatment, and Latinos were less likely to report both verbal and financial mistreatment than white older adults.⁷⁴ In the National Elder Mistreatment Study, minority racial status predicted only potential neglect.⁷⁵

The National Elder Mistreatment Study also found that lower

income, less than \$35,000 per year, was associated with neglect. A prior traumatic experience put older adults at increased risk of emotional, sexual and stranger-perpetrated financial mistreatment. In addition, the use of social services did reduce the risk of financial exploitation by family members but was not found to reduce the risk of other forms of mistreatment and neglect.⁷⁶

Risk factors for elder abuse and neglect

Physically impaired older adults may be at greater risk of mistreatment because they may be less able to defend themselves against their abuser.⁷⁷ The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study found that older adults who were unable to care for themselves were more likely to suffer from abuse.⁷⁸ Several other studies of non-institutionalized older adults have also found an association between elder mistreatment and physical impairment, including a 1997 study of older adults in Connecticut that found that an inability to perform activities of daily living left them more vulnerable to elder abuse and a 2010 study that found that those who reported having difficulty completing at least one instrumental activity of daily living, such as housework or using the phone, were at greater risk of financial exploitation.⁷⁹

However, the role of the victim's health and functional status as a risk factor of elder abuse is less than certain. The need for assistance with activities of daily living was associated with an increased risk of emotional mistreatment and financial exploitation by family members or

strangers in the National Elder Mistreatment Study but not with other forms of abuse.⁸⁰ Reis and Nahmiash (1998, as cited in Lachs and Pillemer) did not find impairment in activities of daily living predicted elder abuse and several other studies did not find other forms of functional impairment to be a risk factor for abuse by caregivers.⁸¹

Cognitively impaired older adults may be among those most at risk of abuse because they are unable to defend themselves from abuse, or perhaps even recognize, that abuse or neglect are taking place.⁸² In the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, approximately 6 out of 10 substantiated elder abuse victims experienced some degree of confusion. Three-quarters of self-neglecting older adults were found to suffer from some degree of confusion.⁸³ Along with lower levels of overall cognitive function, self-neglect was associated with a poorer ability to remember past events in one's life and to recognize similarities and differences among objects in a 2009 study of older adults in the Chicago area. The likelihood of abuse increased as cognitive function declined in a 1997 study of non-institutionalized older adults in Connecticut. A 2010 study of caregiver-recipient pairs in California found that 61 of the 129 study participants with dementia had been mistreated by their caregivers.⁸⁴

Mental health problems may also leave older adults more vulnerable to abuse and neglect. In a 2000 study, victims of elder abuse referred to a Houston-area hospital had higher levels of depression than older patients referred for other reasons. A 2010 study of older adults in

Pennsylvania found that clinical depression was a consistent predictor of financial and psychological abuse. A 2005 study of elder abuse victims in Virginia found that self-neglecting older adults were more likely to have a problem with alcohol abuse than victims of other types of abuse.⁸⁵ Although researchers have found an association between mental health problems and alcohol abuse, and an older adult's risk of experiencing elder abuse or neglect, studies have not determined that there is a causal relationship.

Shared living situations appear to both protect older adults from some forms of mistreatment but put them at greater risk of others. Lachs and Pillemer cite both empirical studies and clinical accounts which document that a shared living situation is a major risk factor for elder abuse and that people living alone are at lowest risk. One reason for this may be the increased opportunities for contact, and, therefore, conflict and tension, in a shared living situation. Financial abuse was the exception to the rule, for which victims disproportionately live alone.⁸⁶ A 2008 study of adults aged 57 to 85 also found that those with a spouse or partner faced much lower odds of financial mistreatment than older adults who were alone.⁸⁷

With the exception of financial exploitation by family, social support emerged as a central risk or protective factor for all other forms of elder mistreatment in the National Elder Mistreatment Study. High social support was protective against – and low social support was predictive of – emotional, physical and sexual mistreatment, and neglect. Prior research has also indicated that social sup-

port is linked to improved health and mental health.⁸⁸

Lachs and Pillemer also identified social isolation as a risk factor for elder abuse, with victims more likely to be isolated from friends and relatives – besides the person with whom they may be living – than non-victims.⁸⁹ The GAO also cited a lack of social support as a risk factor for elder abuse and neglect. The agency's report points to the findings of a 2006 study that compared older adults who had been victims of self-neglect with other older adults and found that self-neglecters had less contact with children and siblings, visited less frequently with friends and neighbors, and participated less in religious activities.⁹⁰

Consequences of abuse and neglect

Researchers have found that elder abuse affects victims' health and longevity. Two studies have linked elder abuse with shorter longevity. A 1998 longitudinal study comparing abused and non-abused community-dwelling adults older than 65 years in Connecticut found that only 9 percent of those abused at some point between 1982 and 1992 were still alive in 1995, compared with about 40 percent of those who had not been abused.⁹¹ A 2009 study of Chicago residents age 65 and older participating in the Chicago Health and Aging Project found that confirmed elder abuse significantly increased older adults' risk of mortality by more than two times (2.06). Older adults with confirmed cases of self-neglect had almost six times (5.76) greater risk of mortality at one-year follow-up.⁹²

A 2006 study found that older women in the Midwest who were psychologically abused once, repeatedly, or in conjunction with other forms of abuse, reported higher rates of certain health problems than older women who had not been abused.⁹³

Even in instances in which death does not take place as a result of the abuse or neglect incident, an older adult may experience the loss of physical abilities. Even minor injuries can interact, "with chronic physical conditions interfering greatly with physical mobility."⁹⁴

Victims of elder abuse and neglect may lose the ability to live independently and may even become homeless altogether. Investigators examining the link between APS intervention and nursing home placement found that the strongest risk factor for nursing home placement was APS referral for self-neglect.⁹⁵ One study that analyzed case files over a three-year period in Virginia found that being a victim of elder abuse and neglect increased the risk of becoming homeless for women age 50 and older.⁹⁶

Older adults who are victims of elder abuse and neglect experience time deprivations – time that the victim could have spent doing something else if not for the victimization – as do their caregivers, who will experience time deprivations in their attempts to help the older victim recover from the victimization.

This time is often spent going to the doctor or other treatment programs, and time spent engaged in the criminal justice process.⁹⁷

Victims of elder abuse also suffer financial losses. The MetLife Study of Elder Financial Abuse found that the annual financial loss by victims of elder financial exploitation is estimated to be at least \$2.9 billion, a 12 percent increase from the \$2.6 billion estimated in 2008.⁹⁸ The Utah Cost of Financial Exploitation study found that Utah seniors, businesses, and the government could have lost more than \$51.5 million in 2009 due to financial exploitation alone.⁹⁹

Economic losses experienced by older crime victims are potentially more severe than those experienced by younger victims. For example, older adults, many on fixed incomes and with less money, experience more harm from small financial losses than others. Stiegal (1995, as cited in Payne) notes that, "older persons may have less ability to recover from financial exploitation if they are already retired because of their short remaining life span."¹⁰⁰ Younger victims have an opportunity to rebuild their assets over their lifetime through income received from working. For older adults on fixed incomes, they may never regain the money or lost real estate unless they seek legal recourse.¹⁰¹

Seeking legal remedy may lead to re-victimization of older adult financial exploitation victims. The time the victim and their caregivers spend meeting with attorneys, filing depositions, and doing other activities necessary in seeking legal redress take away from the time and subsequent wages victims and their caretakers would be getting on their job. According to Hankin (1996, as cited in Payne), "abusers and their lawyers are aware of the financial pressures on the victim and may take advantage of that by dragging out litigation and making the victim's lawyers devote more of their costly time to the litigation."¹⁰²

Finally, older adult victims of abuse will also incur economic losses as a result of medical treatment that may be required as a result of their victimization. One study which placed dollar figures on losses that take into account pain and suffering, health care needs, lost income and so on concluded that, all things considered, the cost of being a sexual assault victim is estimated at \$110,000 for the victim and \$87,000 for society. These costs likely hurt older adults more because, in general, they have less flexible income.¹⁰³

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