FACT SHEET

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Building Strong Support for Elders

Frequently Asked Questions About

ELDER ABUSE, NEGLECT, and EXPLOITATION

TOGETHER, WE CAN PREVENT AND ADDRESS ELDER ABUSE.

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ELDER ABUSE, NEGLECT, and EXPLOITATION

This booklet is designed as a reference for organizations when responding to inquiries about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Many times, the inquiries pose some hard-to-answer questions, and this booklet pulls together what is known about elder abuse to provide suggestions on how we can respond. Remember that in addition to questions about the topic in general, we should be able to answer this question: "What are we doing about the problem?" Taking a quick inventory of our efforts as well as those at the state and local levels will help us to be prepared for such a question.

What Is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a caregiver or trusted individual that causes harm to an older person. Elder abuse takes many forms, including:

- Neglect or Isolation
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse and exploitation
- Emotional or psychological abuse (including verbal abuse and threats)

Each state defines elder abuse differently. (You may wish to look up your state's statutes to see how elder abuse is defined. For assistance, contact the NCEA.)

There is some debate over whether mistreatment by strangers, rather than by a person in a trust relationship to the older person such as spouse, child, or friend, also constitutes elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Why Should We Care About Elder Abuse?

Caring about elder abuse is caring about justice for all. As a country, we are committed to ensuring the just treatment of all people, but elder abuse violates this value.

The costs of elder abuse are high for the affected individuals and society alike. Their losses can be tangible (homes and life savings) and intangible (dignity, independence, and possibly their lives). For society, elder abuse is both a social and economic issue: it creates health care and legal costs, which are often shouldered by public programs like Medicare and Medicaid, and isolates them from the community. It's in everyone's interest to care about and prevent elder abuse.

What Causes Elder Abuse?

Our policies and practices make it hard to stay involved with and connected to our communities as we age. As a result, older people are more likely to experience social isolation, which increases the likelihood of abuse and neglect.

Elder abuse affects older people across all socioeconomic groups, cultures, and races and can occur anywhere when they are disconnected from social supports:

- In a person's own home
- In nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and other institutional settings
- In hospitals

While any older person is potentially at risk of elder abuse, some are more susceptible to experience abuse or neglect than others. Based on available information, women and people 80 and older are more likely to experience abuse. Factors such as dementia or poor physical health can increase older people's isolation, which in turn puts people at greater risk of experiencing abuse or neglect.

SOME COMMON RISK FACTORS:

- Dementia
- Mental health or substance abuse issues of an older person and/or a perpetrator
- Social isolation
- Poor physical health

! *Caring about elder abuse is caring about justice for all.*

How Can We Prevent and Address the Problem?

There are many ways to get involved in creating a stronger society that safeguards our communities and prevents elder abuse from occurring. We can all be "beams" of support in our society structure.

BUILD PUBLIC AWARENESS AND GRASS-ROOTS INVOLVEMENT:

- Talk about the issue to increase the identification and reporting of abuse by the public, professionals, and older people who experience abuse
- Provide older people who experience abuse with a safe environment to speak out and tell their stories
- Begin long-term prevention by raising awareness of solutions among students and young people
- Challenge injustice and ageist stereotypes

ENHANCED SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE ABUSE:

- To help prevent abuse, more services to reduce isolation should be available to those at risk for abuse
- To intervene more effectively, shelters for older people and other support services, such as in-home help and in-home medical attention, should be established and targeted to at-risk older people to mitigate the risk of abuse or to remove people from dangerous situations
- To protect their well-being and assets and to prevent further harm, adequate services should be targeted to older people who experience abuse

ENHANCED SYSTEM RESPONSES:

- To improve the training of state adult protective services workers so they are prepared to respond to increasing numbers of elder abuse reports
- To improve continuing education for mandated reporters on: risk factors and red flags of elder abuse, what to do when they suspect elder abuse, where to report suspicions, and how to respond most effectively

RESEARCH ON:

- The scope of the problem (i.e., incidence and prevalence)
- The causes of the problem
- The effectiveness of interventions and prevention strategies
- The impact and monetary costs of elder abuse on the lives of older people, families, communities, and society in general

The time is right to get involved by promoting community involvement and social engagement.

BE A "SENTINEL"

- Keep in contact and talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives frequently
- Be aware and alert for the possibility of abuse
- Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances
- Ask questions and listen

Just How Big Is the Problem?

Elder abuse is an injustice with many consequences for our society, affecting everything from our communities' public health to our economic resources.

Elder abuse is widespread. A comprehensive review article published in 2015 found the prevalence of elder abuse to be approximately 10% including physical abuse, psychological or verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, and neglect.[1]

Elder abuse is significantly under-identified and under-reported. This is in part due to a lack of social supports that would make it easier for those who experience abuse to report it. The New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study found that for every case known to programs and agencies, 24 were unknown.[2]

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[1] Lachs, M., & Pillemer, K. (2015). Elder abuse. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 373, 1947–56. doi: 10.1056/NEJMra1404688.

[2] Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc., Weill Cornell Medical Center of Cornell University. & New York City Department for the Aging. (2011) Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study. New York: Author

Why Does Elder Abuse Remain Such an "Invisible" Problem?

Like other forms of interpersonal violence, elder abuse usually occurs behind closed doors.

Many people who experience elder abuse are *reluctant to report* abuse because they may:

- Feel ashamed and embarrassed, particularly if a family member is the perpetrator
- Be afraid that the perpetrator will get in trouble
- Worry that they will be forced to live in a nursing home—and this sometimes happens
- Feel guilty or somehow to blame
- Be in denial that the abuse is occurring, or unaware that what they are experiencing is abuse or neglect
- Be afraid that if they report, the abuse will get worse

Some people who experience elder abuse may also be *unable to speak out* due to dementia or other impairments, or may not be believed when they do.

There are also indications that a culture of *ageism (biases against aging) and a fear of growing old* may keep older people marginalized and undervalued in our society, therefore many problems as we age remain invisible or are viewed as unimportant.

Aren't Some People Required to Report by Law?

Each state has its own reporting requirements, and many professionals who work closely with older people are "mandatory reporters" by state statute. You may wish to look up who in your state is designated by state statute as a mandated reporter. For assistance, contact the NCEA.

Unfortunately, many mandated reporters may not make reports because they:

- May not receive regular training and education to accurately distinguish the signs of "normal" aging from elder abuse or neglect
- May be in denial about the prevalence of elder abuse, and therefore will not look for or identify suspicious activities or symptoms

To help prevent abuse, more services to reduce isolation should be available to those at risk for abuse.

How Can We Report Elder Abuse?

It is up to everyone to prevent and address elder abuse. Report suspected mistreatment to your local adult protective services, long-term care ombudsman or law enforcement agency who can investigate the situation.

Programs such as Adult Protective Services (APS) and the Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are here to help. For reporting numbers, contact Eldercare Locator at **1-800-677-1116** (eldercare.gov).

If you believe that an older person is in a life-threatening situation, contact 911 or the local police or sheriff's department.

Learn more about the issue. Visit the National Center on Elder Abuse website at https://ncea.acl.gov.

Where Can I Find More Information?

Visit the website of the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA): https://ncea.acl.gov, or contact us by email: ncea-info@aoa.hhs.gov; ncea@med.usc.edu by phone: **1-855-500-3537**.

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AAAD Aging Commission of the Mid-South

AREA AGENCY ON AGING AND DISABILITY

Our mission is to provide information and assistance to connect seniors, adults with disabilities, their families and caregivers with the tools needed to maximize their independence and safety in their chosen community. We envision Age and Disability Friendly Communities.

(901) 222-4111
www.shelbycountytn.gov/3433/Aging-Commission-of-the-Mid-South

CREA
Coordinated Response to Elder Abuse
Memphis and Shelby County

CREA works with a network of agencies to address elder abuse and improve the protection of older adults by empowering them so they may be an advocate for themselves and their communities.

(901) 222-4400
www.familysafetycenter.org/how-we-help/crea/

Shelby County Crime Victims Center

The Shelby County Crime Victims Center/Rape Crisis Center provides outreach into the community to talk about crime, the affect it has on victims, and how each of us can help those in our midst who have been crime victims. We work collaboratively with many victim and social service agencies in the Memphis and Shelby County area and can tell you about opportunities to make a difference.

Shelby County Rape Crisis Center

(901) 222-4013
www.crimevictimscenter.shelbycountytn.gov

MERITAN®

Meritan provides on-call nurses and a Medical Director who assist with emergency services and in-home health support for CREA clients, in addition to identifying safe, secure and appropriate housing as needed.

(901) 766-0600
www.meritan.org

RISE
responsibility.initiative.solutions.empowerment

SILVER NEIGHBORS

RISE (Responsibility.Initiative. Solution. Empowerment.) is a 501(c)(3)organization that seeks to improve the community by providing financial literacy tools and incentives to help families build assets and make better financial choices.Our Silver Neighbors program empowers older adults to make better choices about their finances.

(901) 507-6644
www.risememphis.org/programs/silverneighbors/

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTER

The Community Legal Center's mission is to provide civil legal services to those with limited means and those at risk, including populations not served by other legal aid agencies.

(901) 543-3395
www.clcmemphis.org

MEMPHIS CRISIS CENTER

The Elder Lifeline through the Memphis Crisis Center is dedicated to helping elders, their families, and caregivers who need support, crisis intervention, collaborative problem-solving, connection to vital resources, and a calm port in difficult times.

(901) 274-7477
www.memphiscrisiscenter.org/#

MIFA
Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association

MIFA's Long-Term Care Ombudsman program advocates for residents of long-term care facilities, including nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, and residential care homes.

(901) 529-4565
www.mifa.org

MEMPHIS DATA PARTNERS
IMPROVING FAMILY & COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Memphis Data Partners is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, evaluation, assessment and improvement science organization.

contact@memphisdatapartners.org
www.memphisdatapartners.org/

TENNESSEE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN

This program provides assistance to elderly Tennesseans residing in nursing homes, homes for the aged, and assisted care living facilities. The Ombudsman is available to help residents and their families resolve questions or problems and will advocate for solutions to problems for qualified residents of long-term care facilities.

(615) 741-2056
www.tn.gov/aging/our-programs/long-term-care-ombudsman.html

CASE MANAGEMENT INC.

The mission of Case Management, Inc is to respond to and empower those in our community with mental illness and co-occurring disorders by developing, coordinating and providing diversified quality services to meet their needs.

(901) 821-5600
www.cmiofmemphis.org