Elder Abuse and Neglect

Statement and Significance of the problem

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Every year millions of elderly people in the United States become victims of abuse and neglect. As the population of older adults increases, so do cases of elder abuse. People who were independent and self-sufficient can find themselves completely dependent on relatives or nursing home staff.

No one is safe from elder abuse, including the rich and powerful. Even [Brooke Astor](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2009/05/26/2009-05-26_brooke_astors_son_anthony_marshall_kissed_his_mother_not_often.html), an American philanthropist, socialite and writer, was a victim. Her son Anthony Marshall was reported to have mistreated her in a series of scandals before Brooke's death in 2007. Whereas many cases of elder abuse are reported to the authorities, many more are not. As elder people become more physically and mentally weak, they become more susceptible to abuse and neglect and often aren't even aware of the laws that are meant to protect elders. Some elderly people may know about the laws but be embarrassed to report abuse carried out by their relatives, afraid to be placed into a nursing home if they live at home, or may worry about punishment from their abusers.

Elder abuse usually occurs where the senior lives: most often in their homes. Their abusers are often their adult children, grandchildren, or spouses. Very often, nursing homes and long-term care facilities are sources of elder abuse as well. In these cases, the abusers are other home residents and facility staff.

Elder abuse includes physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse or exploitation, and neglect. It relates to any sort of action by a caregiver or any other person which causes harm or creates the risk of harm to an elderly person.

Not long ago, what happened within the home was considered to be a personal, family matter and was hidden from the public. During the last two decades, there has been a growing concern about the significance of elder abuse problem and so this tendency to hide such things is slowly falling away.

According to data analysis from the recent studies 4.6 percent of elders reported emotional abuse; 1.6 percent, physical abuse; 0.6 percent, sexual abuse; 5.1 percent, neglect; 5.2 percent, current financial exploitation by family; 6.5 percent, lifetime financial exploitation by a stranger. Data analysis additionally indicated that spouses or partners were more likely than adult children to perpetrate most forms of elder abuse, that more verbal abuse was perpetuated against women and those with physical disabilities, and that there was more financial abuse for African Americans and those without a spouse or partner.

The statistics from cited studies denote that there several risk factors for elder abuse which differ somewhat depending upon the form of elder abuse. For example, victims with physical disabilities were linked with the risk of financial abuse; victims with low income, poor health, and no social support were associated with neglect. Elders, who live with perpetrators who were unemployed, substance abusers, and had mental health problems, have elevated risk for physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Research that was made in Chicago Health and Aging Project highlighted mortality as a consequence of elder abuse, and stated that there a higher mortality rate for abused elders than non-abused elders. Abuse victims also experienced poorer health and functioning. In addition, black older adults had a higher mortality rate than their white neighbors did.

Among the greatest fears of older adults is institutionalization. This often leads them to not reporting domestic abuse because they are afraid of being put into an assisted living facility. These fears are founded because institutionalization is a common outcome of elder abuse. The logic behind this is that a nursing home is a place where elderly should be safe. Unfortunately, this is not always the case either. Some nursing homes residents undergo mistreatment in different ways: physical abuse, illegally imposed restrictions, theft. Often nurses are not on the lookout for abuse because they consider basic attendance to health issues their main priority. However, it is time for them to channel their professional code of ethics and restructure their definition of “caregiving” to include a broader spectrum of responsibilities, including protecting the elderly from abuse and neglect, no matter who is responsible for that abuse and neglect.

References

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