

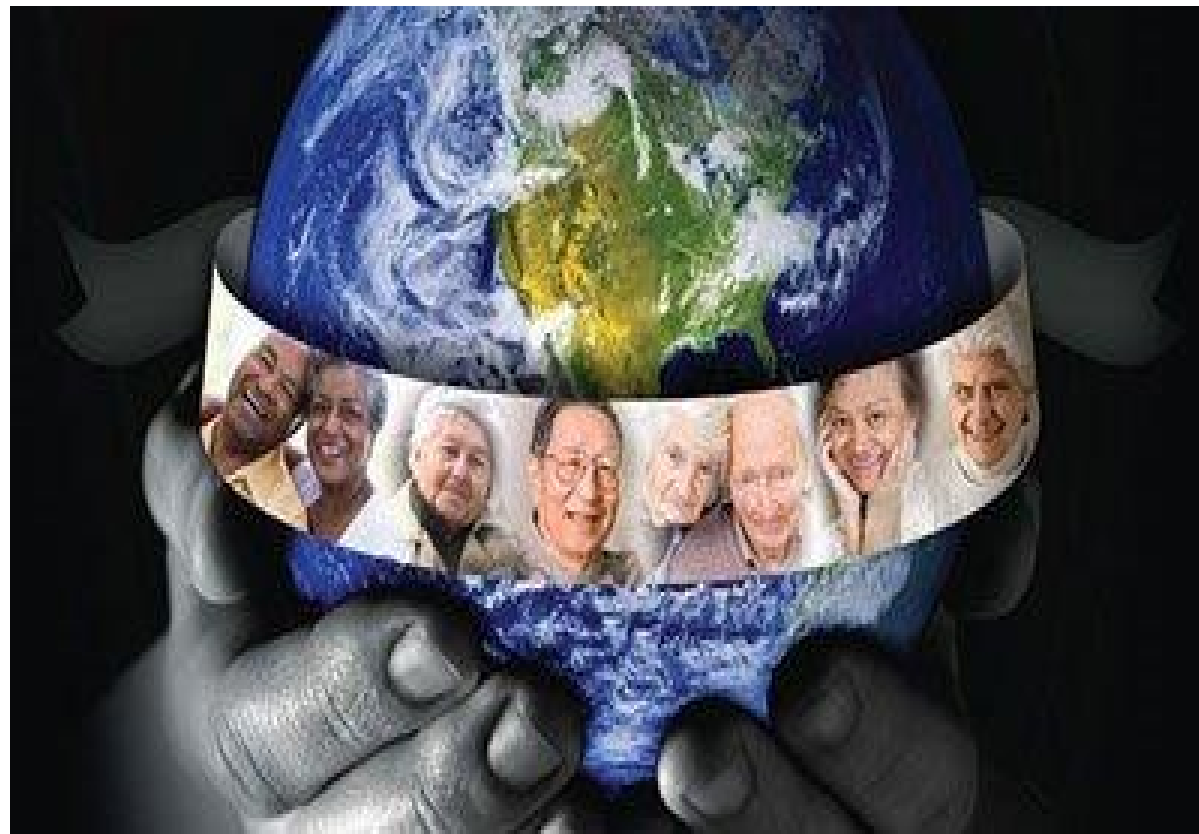
# Understanding Elder Abuse

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# Esther

Esther and Ron have been married for 62 years. In June their grandson came to their condo unannounced and found Ron holding Esther down with a towel over her face, screaming “This is for Goldberg”. When they noticed the young man they gathered themselves and the Ron left the room. Esther explained that it was about something that happened years ago and apologized that Aaron had to see that. She then made him a sandwich.

# Marie

Marie was so grateful that her sister's grandchildren visited her because her own live so far away. It made her feel like "old times" when they brought their friends to watch movies at her house. When they were not there it was so lonely. The one young man was so attentive and always asked about what chores he could do for her. When he came to install the air conditioner for the summer, he told her she could do a favor for him too and then he raped her.

# Frank

Frank is a 77 year old who was happily married for over 50 years. When his wife was ill, he was excited for her when she received a call that she had won the lottery in Canada. She loved her lotto tickets. Taking \$2,100 out of savings to pay the taxes on her winnings seemed a small price to pay for her to get such a big check. He didn't tell her about the call, wanting her to be surprised when the winnings arrived. When the "IRS" agent called to say she had neglected to pay taxes on all the winnings she had over the years from her lucky streak on the scratch offs and they now owed more than \$5,000 Frank did not want to upset her so he borrowed the money from his pension fund to pay it without Veronica's knowledge.

# What do you think they did?

- What did Aaron do with the information about his grandparents?
- Who did Marie tell about the sexual assault by her nephew's friend?
- Besides losing some hard earned savings, what else happened to Frank?

# Forms of Elder Abuse

- Physical: hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, and using a weapon, restraining, false imprisonment, giving excessive or improper medications.
- Psychological/Emotional: Name calling, humiliating a person, constant criticism, blaming, or non-verbal forms of abuse such as ignoring, or giving someone the “silent treatment”.

# Forms of Elder Abuse

- Financial abuse: Also known as financial exploitation. Illegal or unauthorized use of a person's property, money, bank account or other valuables. It may be obtained by deception, coercion, misrepresentation, undue influence, or theft. This includes fraudulently obtaining or use of a power of attorney. Financial abuse includes deprivation of money or other property. Financial abuse includes scams by strangers such as worthless sweepstakes, lottery fraud, predatory lending and other fraudulent



# Forms of Elder Abuse

- Sexual Abuse : Forcing an elder person to take part in a sexual activity without their consent . It also includes situations when an older adult is no longer capable of giving consent.
- Neglect: Depriving a person of food, heat, shelter, water, comfort or essential medications and depriving a person of needed services to force certain kinds of actions, financial and otherwise. The deprivation may be intentional or happen out of a lack of knowledge of resources.

# Forms of Elder Abuse

- **Abandonment:** Deserting a dependent person with the intent to abandon them or leave them unattended at a place for such a period of time as may be likely to harm with health or well-being.
- **Rights Abuse:** Denying the civil or constitutional rights of a person who is old, but not declared by a court to be mentally incapacitated.

# Additional Forms of Elder Abuse

## ELDER MISTREATMENT:

- Intentional actions that cause harm or create a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable elder by a caregiver or other person who stands in a trust relationship to the elder or;
- Failure by a caregiver to satisfy the elder's basic needs or to protect the elder from harm.

National Research Council, 2003

# Elder Abuse Power & Control



# Prevalence

- Over **one million elderly people** are abused in the US annually (in 2003 the estimate was half of that)
- **Two thirds of abuse** toward the elderly is perpetrated by adult children or spouses
- 24% of murder victims over 60 are **killed by their spouses**
- 42% of murder victims over 60 are **killed by their own children**
- Surveys indicate **2-10% of persons over 65** report abuse
- Experts believe that each reported case **represents between 14-24 actual cases**

# Background Laws and Acts

- **Elder Justice Act of 2009** was enacted in March 2010 as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act
- **The Older Americans Act** (42 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.) contains definitions of elder abuse and authorizes federal funding for the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), a program of the U.S. Administration on Aging.
- **The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013** includes language that will help protect seniors from elder abuse with funding for awareness and prevention activities.

# Reporting and other considerations

- Differences in definitions point to the various ways to look at Elder Abuse. All 50 states have laws about reporting codified definitions. Not all laws are the same and some do not include neglect/protection from harm.
- What are the moral and ethical issues that transcend the legal ones? What should one do if there is “mistreatment” but not abuse?
- Is it Elder Abuse just because of the numerical age or must we look at age related deficits or symptoms?

# Maryland Law

- Md. Code Ann., Fam. Law § 14-302(a) and (d)
- (a) Notwithstanding any law on privileged communications, each health practitioner, police officer, or human service worker
- who contacts, examines, attends, or treats an alleged vulnerable adult, and who has reason to believe that the alleged
- vulnerable adult has been subjected to abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation shall:
- (1) notify the local department; and
- (2) if acting as a staff member of a hospital or public health agency, immediately notify and give all the information required
- by this section to the head of the institution or the designee of the head.
- (d) Insofar as is reasonably possible, an individual who makes a report under this section shall include in the report {related info}



# Controversy about Reporting

- Reporting laws grew out of child protection field.
- Some states have mandated reporting for domestic violence but that has been controversial.
- IPV field has grounding in a mission of empowerment of victims and this is contrary to making important decisions for adults.
- There is debate and some evidence that reporting laws suppress reporting in some situations and populations.

# Elder Abuse

## Challenges our Assumptions

### ACTIVITY

#### Agree or Disagree

It is acceptable for a 34 year old woman to make bad decisions about her relationship safety?



# Elder Abuse

## Challenges our Assumptions

It is acceptable for a 34 year old woman to make bad decisions about her relationship safety.

Agree or Disagree

It is acceptable for a 74 year old woman to make bad decisions about her relationship safety.



# **Elder Abuse**

## **Challenges our Assumptions**

Agree or Disagree

Domestic Violence occurs because of the high stress associated with things like unemployment, substance abuse , and/or mental illness.

# **Elder Abuse**

## **Challenges our Assumptions**

Domestic Violence occurs because of the high stress associated with things like unemployment, substance abuse, and/or mental illness.

### **Agree or Disagree**

Elder Abuse occurs because of the high stress associated with the caretaking of an older adult, challenging living environments and balancing of caring for ones parents and children.

# Elder Abuse

## Challenges our Assumptions

Agree or Disagree

A 75 year old woman , who tells you her boyfriend consistently pressures her to perform oral sex on him, is being abused.

# Elder Abuse

## Challenges our Assumptions

A 75 year old woman who tells you her boyfriend consistently pressures her to perform oral sex on him is being abused.

Agree or Disagree

A 75 year old man telling you that his girlfriend is coercing him to perform oral sex on her is suffering from dementia.





# Expanding view of traditional Intimate Partner Abuse

- Pattern of abuse key in traditional Intimate Partner Violence but one time events may be catastrophic to elderly person
- Failure to meet needs not included in standard definition of Intimate Partner Violence
- Understanding of dependency in relationships in Abuse of the Elderly similar to child abuse, but cannot assume guardianship or decision making

# Types of Relationships in Elder Abuse

## DV Grown Old

Two people are in a long term intimate relationship and the abuse has occurred through out the relationship

- The abuse might have been physical at one time but is now more emotional or financial
- The effect of the abuse is more serious because of the age and/or physical status of the couple
- The long term effect of abuse on the victims mental and/or physical well being

# Types of Relationships in Elder Abuse

## New Relationships

A new relationship begins in later life perhaps following a divorce or death of a previous partner

- The victim may not recognize the behavior as abusive
- The victim's first relationship may have been abusive and he/she is feeling embarrassed and at fault
- The abuser's true motive for the relationship become apparent after marriage ( financial, immigration status )

# Types of Relationships in Elder Abuse

## Late onset of Abuse

- ❑ Late onset abuse may be caused by a medical or cognitive problem.
- ❑ A relationship that has not been abusive in the past becomes abusive. Or, there has been emotional abuse in the past and it has become physically abusive.
- ❑ What once was an abusive relationship by one spouse has now turned in direction or has become multidirectional.

## Mutual abuse/or reversal of abuse

- After years of being abused the victim may be in the position to now be more in control of the relationship due to illness or older age and become abusive themselves.
- Victims do fight back, even older ones.

# Elder Abuse

- Similar to IPV, many are spouses and intimate partners but also include adult children, grandchildren and other relatives who may or may not be in a caretaker role
- Unrelated Person in caretaker role who may or may not be paid; neighbor, or “friend”
- Suicide risk increases with age (in white males especially) and suicide risk is also a risk factor in lethality in abusive relationships
- There is little specific literature on standard lethality and danger assessment with older perpetrators and instruments are not modified to indicate any increased risk due to deficits related to aging.

# The World Health Organization Definition for Elder Abuse

“ A single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person. “ The core element of the harm of elder abuse is the “expectation of trust” of the older person toward their abuser. It includes harm by people the older person knows or with whom they have a relationship such as a spouse, life partner, family member, friend or neighbor, or people that the older person relies on for services.





# Abuse and Trauma

- Abuse is often defined as the specific acts and behaviors perpetrated on victims
- Trauma is the response to those acts by the victim and survivors and varies in intensity, duration and manifestation depending on a variety of factors and become salient at different developmental stages

# Research in Trauma in Older Adults

- Community sample of women aged 70+ indicated 72 % had experienced interpersonal trauma in their lifetime. Older women reporting intimate partner violence differ from younger women in that the length of exposure is frequently longer.
- Exposure to trauma in male populations reported at 70% reflect a higher incidence of combat trauma in older men.

# Research in Trauma in Older Adults

- PTSD appears to be less prevalent in older trauma survivors than younger individuals but still should be considered during assessment.
- Older trauma survivors report higher somatic symptoms related to trauma (age related norms about reporting)
- Research indicates that standard assessment tools for PTSD are still effective but perhaps should be used with lower cut off scores
- Greater lifetime trauma is correlated to increased medical problems including dementia

# Research in Trauma in Older Adults

- LOSS - Late Onset Stress Symptomatology relates to the onset of the development of increased thoughts regarding trauma and stronger emotional response to past events. Not necessarily a sign of “losing it psychologically” but a pattern of increased concern with age that does not meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD.
- Sub-threshold PTSD still can cause distress and should be addressed with coping strategies offered to any adult trauma survivor.
- Exposure Therapies and Cognitive Therapies appear effective with older adults but are rarely offered in cases of Elder Abuse.

# Assessing Trauma in Older Adults

- When dealing with Elder Abuse victims assessment of prior trauma essential to determine presence of re-activation of prior traumatic experiences.
- Reactivation may account for severity of emotional response that otherwise could be misinterpreted.
- Offering treatment of past trauma appropriate for older adults; resignation in older adults should not be tolerated any more than it should be in younger adults.
- Trauma informed therapies are recommended for older adults experiencing PTSD related symptoms with modifications related to time, repetition, medical screening.

# Victim Blaming in Elder Abuse

Victim Blaming a phenomena that has always existed but has decreased over time with increased awareness.

The victims in Elder Abuse cases may still have a bias to blame the victim even if it is them

Family members may put the responsibility on the victim if the abuse began at a time when the victim had more resources to deal with it

The remedies for dealing with an abusive family member are more limited than the victim so focus can be on victim which can increase real or perceived victim blaming

# Looking at the work Differently

- Cannot remain in the confines of traditional domestic violence programming.
- Is not appropriate to utilize same tactics for protecting children .
- Incidents themselves look different than other abuse situations.

# Looking at the work Differently

- What cultural differences exist in the world in which the victim is currently experiencing abuse and the one in which he or she developed their values, gender roles and feelings about asking for help from outsiders.
- What are the chances that education to promote a change in the victim's world view will be an effective intervention with a 75 year old?



- It is all about Safety

# Circle of Safety

- As in all cases of abuse the lethality and danger level must be addressed immediately and the victim must be the primary source of information regardless of limitations.
- Working with only the abused elder is not a likely scenario so how do you keep the victim safe and honor the right to confidentiality.
- Who do you bring into the victim's circle of safety? How do you know the person is safe? How do you know that helping the victim does not put the other person at risk?

# Challenges of Designing Interventions

- **Domestic Violence Shelters and Safehouses** as they now exist do not have adequate facilities to encourage elderly victims to choose to leave their homes to seek safety which increases vulnerability.
- **Victims of Elder abuse are hidden** Many victims have chosen to decrease number of activities to manage better which can disrupt a safety net that they had earlier in life.
- **Domestic violence advocates** are not well trained in the cognitive deficits or psychological ailments of the aged may have understandable confusion between trauma and age related issues.
- **Traditional senior services** have difficulty serving individuals whose behaviors are unpredictable and part of a cycle of abuse and violence. No recent training in doing danger/lethality assessments.

# GAO Study on Most Effective Strategies in Combatting Elder Abuse

- In home services to combat “causes”
- Interagency Coordination
- In-home respite care
- Legal protection
- Community based support services
- Counseling
- Reporting laws
- Shelter

# Elder Abuse Center for Baltimore Jewish Community

- Partnership among Jewish Community Services, Levindale Geriatric Center and CHANA (domestic violence provider)
- First step will be to establish partnerships with Public servants (APS, Law Enforcement, Senior Centers); Private sector (Lawyers, Finance professionals, Mental Health practitioners) and ask those with knowledge to help establish protocols, goals and procedures
  - **Prevention education for potential victims**
  - **Awareness education for potential bystanders**
    - **Concept of Virtual Shelter**

**Thank You**

