



D45 Elder Abuse: Keep Your Family Close and Your Wallet Closer

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the dynamics of elder abuse, identify three major forms of elder abuse in San Diego County, and identify an at-risk population for financial abuse.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising the awareness of financial abuse in the elder community, showing perpetrator and elder relationships, and highlighting the need for further forensic investigation and research in financial abuse.

Elder abuse is a recognized social problem in the United States. It was first labeled as “granny bashing” in British medical journals in the 1960’s but this problem remained poorly addressed until one of the earliest studies in America surfaced in 1979. In 1976 the Subcommittee

on Housing and Consumer Interests noted that no group of American citizens suffered more painful losses at the hands of criminal predators than the elderly. The Administration on Aging had stressed the importance of investigation into elder mistreatment in 1978. Originally studied under the umbrella of family violence, maltreatment of the elderly has received more funding and research attention in recent years. The National Center on Elder Abuse has defined domestic elder abuse as “any of several forms of maltreatment of an older person by someone who has a special relationship with an elder, such as a spouse, sibling, child, friend, or caregiver. The American Medical Association also provided a definition of elder abuse that stated “abuse shall mean an act or omission which results in harm or threatened harm to the health or welfare of an elderly person. Abuse includes intentional infliction of physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; or withholding of necessary food, clothing, and medical care to meet the physical and mental needs of an elderly person by one having the care, custody, or responsibility of an elderly person.” Multiple aspects of elder abuse have been examined in the literature including measures for detection, assessment, and documentation. Sexual abuse of the elderly has been documented in several studies, often including victims with functional or cognitive impairment. Sexual homicide is also well documented in the literature. Financial exploitation is the inappropriate use of an elderly person’s resources for personal gain, and has become much more prevalent in recent years. Telemarketing fraud, extortion, theft, and credit card fraud has left older adults unable to pay for food, medication, and medical care. Coercion to change a will, signing over deeds, and transfer of personal belongings or giving of material goods without consent all constitute abuse. Financial abuse is expected to increase in the coming years as the population ages. Frequently seen as a valuable and vulnerable target the elderly often have assets that are desirable such as property or good credit. Financial, physical, and sexual abuse are often seen in combination. Although studies have examined the circumstances surrounding abuse as well as theories of causation and characteristics of the abuser and abused, studies of the relationship between the abuser and abused are less well documented. This study examined the abuser relationship, family or non-family, and types of abuse (financial, physical, sexual) in the elderly through evaluation of prosecuted cases of elder abuse by the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office. 155 cases of elder abuse were identified in Court records evaluated for the years 1996 through 2009. Incidence of types of abuse are presented as well as findings for statistical significance for abuser-abused relationship, type of abuse, and demographic predictors for financial and physical abuse, as well as future directions for forensic study in elder abuse. **Elder Abuse, Financial, Perpetrator Dynamics**