



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2015

I14 Elder Abuse: Risk Factors and the Role of the Nurse

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the very serious and under-reported crime of elder abuse.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that further, well-designed studies are needed in order to confront and more fully comprehend this problem facing our aging population.

Currently, elderly people are more active, independent, and likely to be in good health in addition to having a longer life expectancy than in the past. In spite of this, abuse, exploitation, and abandonment of the elderly still remains a hidden and underestimated problem throughout the world. Often the people responsible for these abuses are the victims' relatives or, in cases where the victim resides in some sort of institution or facility, the abusers are often the healthcare workers themselves. Abuse affects the physical and psychological well-being of the aged and may lead to a serious public health problem. From the available data regarding the elderly in Europe, the World Health Organization (WHO) has disclosed that in 2004, about four million people over 60 years of age experienced physical abuse; one million experienced some form of sexual abuse; six million were the victims of financial abuse, and a solid 29 million endured psychological abuse; however, such statistics do not accurately reflect the problem. Often, attention is paid to this phenomenon only when news of medical malpractice is reported by the mass media that tend to report only a part of the overall problem, thus leading to incorrect and inadequate conclusions regarding healthcare workers and the general nature of the phenomenon.

Goal of the Study: Beginning with these assumptions, the goal of this study is to examine the available literature in order to define the role of the nurse regarding elder abuse, focusing on the possible types of abuse perpetrated, the possible reasons for such, and possible preventive interventions.

Materials and Methods: Articles regarding elder abuse taken from international literature from the last five years were selected. This study was carried out using well-known scientific databases such as PubMed®, The Cochrane Library, MEDLINE®, EMBASE®, Medscape, and www.clinicaltrials.gov. The WHO and The National Center for Elder Abuse (NCEA) websites were also used. The following key words were entered into each database: "elder abuse," "elder mistreatment," "abuse and neglect of the elderly," and "elder abuse in nursing homes."

Results: Most scientific studies that deal with the abuse and exploitation of the elderly have been published in the PubMed® databases, whereas in other scientifically recognized sources such studies are relatively scarce. Nevertheless, on the WHO and NCEA websites, this topic is recognized as a serious problem and demonstrates the need for more well-designed and analytical studies in order to improve the approach to this phenomenon. Research into this issue is still lacking even though there has been an increase in published studies on the topic in recent years. Summarizing the data that has emerged from PubMed® regarding elder abuse and utilizing specific key words, it has been deduced that in the last five years approximately 750 articles have been published. These findings have been divided into subcategories and shown in Table 1.

Table1: Distribution of scientific articles on elder abuse in various databases

	PubMed®	Cochrane Library	Medscape
Elder abuse	460	3	4
Elder abuse in nursing homes	60	0	0
Elder mistreatment	80	0	1
Abuse and neglect in elderly	150	0	2



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Conclusions: Analysis of the selected scientific literature shows that the problem of elder abuse is progressively increasing as the population ages. Scientific articles on the subject are relatively scarce and the vast majority of these studies are quite recent, having been published in the past ten years. Though there may be a general misperception of this phenomenon, one that points the finger of elder abuse at healthcare workers, the truth is that most instances of elder abuse happen within the family environment, and even to this day speaking about it is considered to be a real taboo. The studies examined provide some indications that may be utilized in confronting the problem of elder abuse by acting on risk factors and swaying public opinion toward the recognition of the existence of this problem, which in turn could help in developing more effective programs through well-designed research studies.

Elder Abuse, Role of Nurses, Aging Population