



II Elder Abuse: Perception and Knowledge of the Phenomenon by Healthcare Workers From Two Italian Hospitals

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the importance for forensic and healthcare practitioners to recognize early signs of physical, psychological, and emotional abuse on elderly people.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that the absence of early recognition of elder abuse can be a major disadvantage for the community.

Background: With a rapidly aging population in countries worldwide, the number of elderly adults vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation is expected to grow. Hospital personnel usually play a crucial role in identifying mistreatment and making appropriate referrals as they are usually the first people with a medical background to see these victims. Physicians and nurses are also mandatory reporters of elder abuse in accordance with state requirements.

Goals: To establish a level of awareness and perception of elder abuse by healthcare workers, to understand if these workers are able to recognize and report elder abuse properly, and to identify the physical elements of abuse and neglect.

Methods: The research tool was a survey of 35 questions. Selected questions were chosen from previously validated questionnaires used in other similar published survey studies. Participants were represented by physicians, nurses, and care assistants working in the internal medicine and geriatric services of two different University Hospitals, representative of the Italian public health system in Southern Italy (Cardarelli Hospital of the University of Molise and Policlinico of the University of Bari “Aldo Moro”).

Results: The results included 98 of 142 administered questionnaires (69.0% response rate). All data were further analyzed, taking into account age, gender, work experience, and qualifications. For the majority of all personnel, neglect represents a type of abuse; however, approximately 40% of the physicians and 37% of the nurses considered the concept of abuse to be false. The surveyed population was aware that many seniors are victims of abuse and that elder abuse is a form of violation of personal rights, but 46.94% were unsure about the existence of standard procedures for reporting abuse and/or treatment, suggesting low attention paid to the problem and little information provided by institutions on abuse reporting procedures. Regarding whether participants suspected abuse, most nurses (45.7%) and care assistants (68.8%) declared they had never had suspicions of abuse, while 48.7% of physicians stated suspecting abuse on one to three occasions in their lifetime. Only 23.9% of the nurses, 22.4% of the physicians, and 18.8% of the care assistants stated they had witnessed abuse between one and three times in their lives. Surprisingly, in both suspected or witnessed cases, the health care personnel did not take any action and did not report the abuse to public authorities or to adult protective service agencies.

Conclusions: The results of the present survey on health care professionals demonstrate that there is still a strong need for education and specific training programs on elder abuse.

Reference(s):

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