Elder Abuse

Elder abuse, also referred to as elder mistreatment, is any abuse or neglect of a person aged 60 or older by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that threatens his or her health or safety. It is difficult to determine the prevalence of elder abuse because many times cases are not reported. A 2003 National Research Council report estimated that there are between 1 million and 2 million cases of elder abuse and neglect in the United States every year. Family members, adult children, or spouses are implicated in 90% of the cases of elder abuse. Those affected are usually elderly people who are cognitively or physically frail, depressed, lonely, or lacking social support. The August 5, 2009, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue on violence and human rights that includes an article reporting that both elder abuse and self-neglect in a community-dwelling population are associated with an increased risk of death.

TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

- Physical abuse such as the infliction of pain or injury, including physical or drug-induced restraint
- Sexual abuse, including any nonconsensual sexual contact
- Emotional abuse, including infliction of any mental anguish
- Caregiver neglect—refusal or failure to fulfill caregiver obligations to meet basic needs, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care
- Financial exploitation, including any unauthorized or improper use of the funds or resources of an elderly person

RISK FACTORS FOR ELDER ABUSE

- Elders with memory problems (such as dementia) or who are physically dependent on others
- Elders with depression, loneliness, or lack of social support
- Caregiver stress when the caregiver feels overwhelmed with the care of the elder
- Caregiver has history of substance abuse or history of abusing others
- Caregiver has high emotional or financial dependence on the elder

PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE

- Intervene if you suspect elder abuse—in the United States, call the elder care help line at 1-800-677-1116.
- Listen to elders and their caregivers.
- Get help from family, friends, or local support groups.
- Seek counseling or other support if you are feeling stressed or depressed.
- Get help if you have substance abuse problems.

Sources: National Center on Elder Abuse, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/em-factsheet-a.pdf
  www.cdc.gov/features/elderabuse
- National Center on Elder Abuse
  www.ncea.aoa.gov

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