

Elder Abuse

Crime and Violence Prevention Center • California Attorney General's Office



The problem

Statistics uncover a frightening picture of elder abuse in this country. One of every 20 elderly people will be a victim of neglect or physical, psychological or financial abuse this year.

The problem may get worse as the number of elderly Americans increases. People over age 65 will number about 52 million in the year 2020. They will be a big part of the country's population - almost one-sixth of the total. Those aged 85 years or older are the fastest growing group.

As the elderly population multiplies, so will the incidence of elder abuse ... if we don't take action. We must recognize the seriousness of the problem and take steps to prevent it.

Types of abuse

There are four general categories of elder abuse:

- Physical Abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Financial (fiduciary) Abuse
- Neglect

The following cases illustrate the four generally recognized types of elder abuse. Some cases involve more than one type of abusive behavior, such as the abuser victimizing the elderly person both physically and emotionally. (The victims' names have been changed.)

Physical Abuse

Annie Wilson, 76, was assaulted several times by her son who was living with her at home. Neighbors reported these incidents to the police, but the victim and her son denied everything, claiming instead that the neighbors were assaulting them!

The abuse continued until finally the son knocked his mother down, hurting her badly enough that she needed hospitalization. Although Mrs. Wilson still didn't want to press charges, the injuries were severe enough that the son was arrested and charged with felony elder abuse.

Psychological/Emotional Abuse

Bertha Anderson, a deaf, legally blind and wheelchair-bound woman in her 60's, told a neighbor that she was afraid her husband was going to kill her. His behavior was bizarre and he was threatening her with a gun. The neighbor called county adult protective services, and a social worker arranged to pick the client up and drive her to a local women's shelter.

Mrs. Anderson revealed that her husband never let her go out and had kept her virtually a prisoner. He also had refused to take her to an eye doctor, so she lost the sight in one eye due to cataracts. Following surgery for a broken hip, her husband refused to allow her to receive the therapy she required to walk again.

With the help of the social worker Mrs. Anderson obtained a low-income apartment adapted for a wheelchair and qualified for SSI and In-Home Support Services. She also got involved in recreational and social programs sponsored by the Blind Aid Society and received appropriate medical care for her eyes and injured hip.

Financial Abuse

Andy Wagner has a history of alcoholism and his mental condition is such that he is very forgetful. The 67-year-old man had previously suffered a fall, resulting in a broken hip. Unable to shop for himself, he was befriended by three women who offered to help him with shopping and cooking.

The women quickly gained his trust and began asking him for money. Mr. Wagner wrote checks to the women, but a short time later would forget that he did so. They kept asking for more money, and not recalling the previous check, he would write another.

Tellers at Mr. Wagner's bank became suspicious of the large amounts of money being withdrawn from his account and asked the police department and county conservator to investigate the situation. A freeze was placed on the account, but more than \$17,000 had already been removed. Eventually the three women were arrested and charged with fiduciary elder abuse.

Neglect

Rita Yeates is a confused and incontinent 91-year-old woman who is cared for by her granddaughter. On one occasion she was found in saturated adult diapers, and on another, she was restrained with ropes around her waist and had several small cuts over her eye.

While the granddaughter appears to care a great deal for her grandmother and tries hard to meet her needs, Mrs. Yeates requires around-the-clock care. Her doctor stated that she needs nursing home care. Adult protective services staff investigated and successfully placed Mrs. Yeates in a nursing home.

What You Can Do

We all have the right to be free from abuse and neglect. If an elderly person you know is being victimized, it is important for you to take action to stop it. Without intervention, abuse almost always escalates. Because victims are often reluctant to report, an elderly person's well-being may depend on you to recognize and report suspected abuse. Together, we can be a lifeline.

Reporting Elder Abuse

Reporting suspected elder abuse is simple. Call the local Long-Term Care Ombudsman or local law enforcement to report abuse in a long-term care facility, such as a nursing home or board and care home.

Abuse occurring anywhere other than a long-term care facility should be reported to the county Adult Protective Services agency (APS).

But, if you suspect abuse that seems to be life-threatening, don't hesitate. Call the police or sheriff's department. They will notify any other agency which may need to be involved.



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California Department of Justice**