

# ELDER ABUSE HURTS

## In More Ways Than One.

**Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center  
New York City Department for the Aging**

It is estimated that each year one of every 20 older Americans is a victim of abuse. Many elderly people are afraid to report incidences of mistreatment or neglect because those who are inflicting the abuse may very well be caretakers known to them, their family members, or significant others.

Elder abuse takes many forms, some of them seemingly more subtle than others. What people don't know about elder abuse - the many ways it is manifested, why it is perpetuated, and what steps to take to deal with it - can really hurt, in more ways than one.

**A** clearer understanding of elder abuse is a first step toward prevention, and intervention. For further assistance, call the Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center of the New York City Department for the Aging, (212) 442-3103.

## There Are Many Forms of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is not just as simple (and horrible) as hitting an older person. It is carried out in many ways besides physical pain or injury. Here are the serious ways the elderly are abused:

- **Psychological/Emotional Abuse:** mental anguish and despair caused by name calling, insulting, ignoring, threatening, isolating, demeaning, and controlling behavior.
- **Financial Abuse:** illegal or unethical exploitation and/or use of cash, credit cards, funds or other assets of older people.
- **Physical Abuse:** slapping, bruising, sexual coercion, cutting, burning, forcibly restraining.
- **Neglect:** the refusal or failure to carry out a caretaking responsibility such as withholding food, medicine, or aids (glasses, dentures) and complete abandonment.

It is important to know that elder abuse is exhibited in many ways, and in many combinations of ways. One of the most commonly reported forms is the simultaneous occurrence of psychological and financial abuse.

## **There Are Many Signs of Elder Abuse**

Clues to the possible presence of elder abuse can be detected in certain physical changes and behavior. Here are some warning signals:

### **Signs in the Elderly**

- New and inadequately explained bruises, cuts or burns
- Dehydrated or malnourished appearance
- Overly medicated or overly sedated
- Indications of unusual confinement (closed off in a room; tied to furniture; change in routine activity)
- Lack of cleanliness, grooming
- Fear of speaking for oneself in the presence of caretaker; anxious to please
- Anxiety, confusion, withdrawal, depression
- Shame, fear, embarrassment
- Sudden withdrawals or closing of bank accounts

### **Signs in the Abusing Caretaker**

- Threatening remarks and/or behavior
- Conflicting stories
- Insults, aggressive behavior
- Withholding of attention, security, affection
- Attitude of indifference or anger toward the older person
- Unusual fatigue, depression
- Obvious absence of assistance, or attendance
- Problems with alcohol or drugs
- Previous history or abusive behavior

## **There Are Many Psychodynamics In Elder Abuse**

The person who is abusive may suffer from external pressures and psychological stress, or even mental illness, or the debilitating effects of substance abuse. Here are some specific influences:

- Substance abuse - alcohol or drugs or both
- Dependency on the older person for emotional support and financial assistance such as money, housing or food, all of which contribute to conflict in the home
- Emotional problems such as resentment of being responsible for the well being of the elderly; retaliation against the older relative for past mistreatment; lack of basic caring feelings in the relationship

- External stress such as crowded housing conditions, unemployment, financial difficulties, illness, divorce, and death can add enormously to the tensions of caretaking
- History of family abusive behavior or other hostile behavior patterns can predispose caretaker to acting out this anger, especially under stress

### **There Are Many Ways to Challenge Elder Abuse**

No one should be reluctant to report evidence of elder abuse, no matter who is doing it!

Any problems or questions you may have about suspected elder abuse will be discussed in complete confidentiality when you call the Department for the Aging's Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center.

We can also link you with the following community resources:

- Case management services
- Protective services
- Support counseling services
- Victims' services network
- Police services
- District Attorney's offices
- Legal services specializing in the elderly