



## PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action which causes harm or stress to an elderly person and takes place within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.

**Purpose:** The investigation of the elder abuse, types of abuse, how to recognize them, as well as their prevention are the subject of this retrospective study.

**Methodology:** The study material consisted scientific publications related to the topic, which was found from international databases Medline, Pub Med, the Greek Iatrotek database and the Association of Greek Academic Libraries (HEAL – Link).

**Results:** The abuse of older people is often a covered problem that occurs in families no matter the race, ethnicity and economic status. Both the care requirements and the needs of the elderly can create situations where abuse is most likely to occur.

**Conclusions:** The creation of support structures is necessary so they can be able to prevent or provide specialized care to elderly people who have suffered abuse.

**Key - words:** elderly, abuse, types of abuse and prevention of abuse.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The world population is rapidly aging, fact that has been described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "demographic revolution." [1] Worldwide, according to the WHO, there are currently about 600 million people over the age of 60, number that is expected to double by 2025 and again by 2050. Among these people, a number that is growing even faster is those of people over 80 years. [1, 2] Therefore, it is expected to rise the need for education and care for elderly and all the issues that affect them. One of them is the study of the phenomenon of elder abuse. Abuse can be defined as "a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which can cause harm or suffering to a person". [3] The elder abuse can cause additional damage or stress to an elderly person and it takes place within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust. [4]

According to the Declaration of Toronto for Global Prevention of Elder Abuse (2002), elder abuse is a single or repeated action - or lack of appropriate action - resulting in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which action causes harm or distress to an elderly person. [5]

The elder abuse is a violation of human rights and a violation of the Article 25 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which recognizes and respects the rights of the elderly to live with dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life. The investigation of where, when and how often appears elder abuse is insufficient and incomplete. Awareness about the seriousness of this case is needed and a Inter-European strategy on elder abuse it is imperative. [6, 7]

The recognition of abuse is difficult in some cases (e.g. physical abuse, violence), however, the situation is complicated when the abuse is faint or if there are no immediate and visible effect on the life of the victim. Also very common and in increasing are the emotional / psychological abuse of the elderly, which although usually are unostentatious, may have determinative and harmful consequences in the elderly. [8, 9]

The purpose of this retrospective study is to highlight the forms of elder abuse, their types, the identification of these, as well as their prevention.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material of study consisted scientific publications related to the topic. The methodology used was based on a literature search and reviewed research studies, which are found on international databases Medline, Pub Med, the Greek Iatrotek database and the Association of Greek Academic Libraries (HEAL - Link), with the key words: elderly, abuse, types of abuse and prevention of abuse.

## III. SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE

Elder abuse includes both abuse and abusive behavior towards the elderly. It may be an act of abuse or neglect, deliberate or accidental, and includes physical violence, psychological or emotional violence, economic abuse or neglect. To classify a behavior as abuse, neglect or exploitation, it depends on the frequency, duration, intensity, severity and the cultural context. [3]

At the beginning, serious signs of elder abuse may not be recognized. In fact, many of the signs and symptoms of elder abuse coincide with the symptoms of mental deterioration, but that does not mean they should be ignored. [2, 9]

### *General symptoms*

Warning signs of some kind of elder abuse are the following [2,10]:

- Disputes or tension between a person and the elderly
- Changes in the personality or the behavior of the elderly
- Sense of fear that is evident in his/her reactions.

### *Symptoms specific types of abuse*

The signs that show that there is abuse, mistreatment or exploitation of the elderly are many and can be integrated in various forms of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional or economic.

Although there are common issues of elder abuse among nations, there are also unique events based on history, culture, economic strength and social perceptions of older people within their nations. The phenomenon of abuse in general is likely to occur in the context that are prevailing high levels of stress (e.g. poverty), while social isolation of some elderly people and their carers may create opportunities that are suitable for financial abuse. [5, 11]

The elder abuse includes a wide range of malicious actions such as:

○ *Physical abuse*: is the use of force in an elderly that can lead to physical pain, injury or malfunction including cardiovascular and musculoskeletal problems. [12, 13] Such abuse includes not only physical attacks, such as hitting, bruising, marks, scars or pushing, but also the use of restrictive measures or inappropriate use of drugs. [14,15]

• *Psychological / Emotional*: Bullying with loud voices and threats is an oral form of emotional abuse of the elderly. Verbal attacks, rejection, isolation or degrading leads or could cause mental pain, anguish or distress to an elderly. Some types of emotional / psychological abuse is the lack of attention, lack of affection, neglect ion, the derogatory way of speaking, the degraded comments , exploitation, threats of violence, yelling and social restriction. [10,11]

- *Sexual Abuse:* The sexual abuse of elderly is the contact with that person without his consent. [16,17]
- *Economic exploitation:* It is the illegal use of funds or property of an elderly without his/her authorization. These may be the illegal or the unauthorized use of property, theft of a elder's money, misleading the elderly or the abuse of property. [2,14]
- *Negligence:* This happens when the caregiver, either family or the persons from the nearby environment of the elderly, for some reason do not meet their obligations or their duties towards him/ her. For elderly, these actions can result in remaining without food, heat, clothing, comfort, adequate sleep, drugs and all the necessary services for living.[18]
- *Civic abuse:* It is the abuse of the political rights of the elderly, sometimes depriving him/her of the rights to the society. [19]

*Other types of abuse* are considered also the following:

- *Self-neglect ion:* Older people lose the courage to live and so they get to neglect themselves. This is often happening because of the decreasing of mental awareness or their inability to cope with it. [20]
- *Insufficient understanding:* The weakness of the perception of s someone caring an elderly that the consequences of his own actions or inaction can lead or may lead to injury or risks for the elderly. [2,21]
- *Abandonment:* Abandonment of elderly by the persons who intend to abandon them or leave them helpless in one place for a long time is likely to jeopardize their well-being or their health. [18, 20]

#### IV. RISK FACTORS FOR ABUSE OF ELDERLY

As the years pass, the situation is getting harder for the old person as it is likely many disabilities or inabilities to occur and every year he/she has the need to be more depended on others. The inability for example to communicate pain because of cognitive, developmental or physiologic issues is a major barrier for them.[22] It is difficult to care for an elderly person, when he or she has many different needs. Both the requirements of the care and needs of elderly can create situations where abuse is most likely to occur. [2]

The older persons are more likely to develop some kind of personality disorders and drug addiction problems than other family members who are not generally aggressive. They may also suffer from many physical and cognitive disabilities, which are identified in recent studies as risk factors for elderly abuse.[11, 23] A disability indicates the presence of a failure that may result from a reduced or impaired physical or mental function, which usually leads to an imbalance between the individual and the environment. [24]

*The financial difficulties* of the perpetrator appear to be an important risk factor. Most often, the perpetrator is facing drug abuse problems which lead him to divert money from the elderly person. Also, the dissatisfaction of the family members to spend money for care of the elderly play an important role in this form of abuse [2, 9]

*The living conditions*, and especially where there is overcrowding in the family or lack of private life, are directly associated with the conflicts in the family. Although there may be cases of abuse when the older person is separated from the caregiver, but when living with the caregiver then it is exposed at even a greater risk. [2, 16]

*Social factors* also are considered important risk factors for the development of elder abuse in both developing and developed countries. Often, compared with other groups in society, older people are presented as vulnerable, weak and dependent on others or even on their own families, and are targeted to exploitation and extermination [23, 24]

Also, *political changes* increase the risk of elder abuse. The signs that have been proposed as risk factors which have affected the overall health and psychopathology of people, especially the elderly who are most vulnerable, includes: the increasing impoverishment of important social values, high levels of unemployment, lack of stability and social security, the externalization of violence, especially among young people. [16, 25]

## V. PREVENTION OF ELDERLY ABUSE

A decrease of the phenomenon of abuse of the elderly requires effort and understanding from everyone but especially by those who are directly connected with situation as with elderly themselves and their close environment. [2,9] In such situations is not only needed that someone to listen to those who are responsible for the care of the elderly and the elderly himself who may be the victim, but also to seek out help from family and from competent advisors or authorities. [2, 26]. For the prevention of elder abuse three things must be done:

- Discussion with the elderly and their caregivers.
- Intervention and not indifference when is suspected an elder abuse.
- Training on other people for the recognition and reporting of elder abuse.

The *prevention of elder abuse* it is made on three levels:

*Primary level prevention*: It refers to approaches aimed at preventing and eliminating violence, even before she even existed. There are taken any measures to protect the individual against possible abuse experience in order to minimize the chances of experiencing abuse in his life. It also refers to any action taken at the social level, with a long term aim of eradicating the problem of abuse in society [23, 27]

*Secondary level prevention*: refers to approaches that are focus on immediate response against violence. It is addressed to individuals or groups of people from high-risk environment, and take any measure necessary to prevent abuse. These include pre-hospital care and emergency departments [2, 27]

*Third level of prevention*: refers to approaches that are focused on long-term assistance and care of the consequence of violence. At this level are those programs that deal with victims after incidents of abuse in order to prevent their recurrence. Examples are the rehabilitation and reintegration of abused person and the efforts made to eliminate the injury, or the restoration of a long-term disability, which is a result of violence. [9, 27]

These three levels of prevention are defined by their temporal aspect, on whether, namely, if there is prevention before a violent incident occurs, immediately after the violent episode or long term.

Preventing elder abuse by caregivers in case the demands of caring for an elderly is large and difficult to meet and so some appropriate actions must be taken like seeking help from relatives and friends of the elderly, in order to have a few hours to rest for better care giving. [2, 23]

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The abuse of older people is a multidimensional and often a covered problem that occurs in families of all races, ethnicities and economic groups. It is a demanding field which requires appropriate handling by the health care professionals. It is essential for the health care professionals to have self-esteem and to develop their skills in order to cope with this essential problem. [28, 29] Good communication between nurses and patients is essential for the successful outcome of individualized nursing care of each patient. [30] Health professionals should also behave according to the values of human dignity, personal autonomy and self-determination. These values are affected in abused people.

Therefore, in order to be effective in recognition and care of elderly abuse victims it is needed to know the characteristics, the consequences and the prevention strategies of an abuse.

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