



Aging is natural... Abuse is not

Abuse in Later Life: A Community Problem with Systemic Solutions

#### A Matter of Justice

"Creating a just society includes treating older people as equal members and making sure we are all connected to our communities as we age, so that we can prevent and address elder abuse."

Frameworks Institute: Talking Elder Abuse





#### Abuse in Later Life as a Social Problem



National Center on Elder Abuse, "Reframing Elder Abuse"







# Dynamics & Impact



#### Abuse in Later Life

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional/verbal abuse
- Neglect
- Financial Exploitation

These forms of abuse often **co-occur** 

NCEA, "Research, Statistics, and Data" (2021) NYS Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (2011)





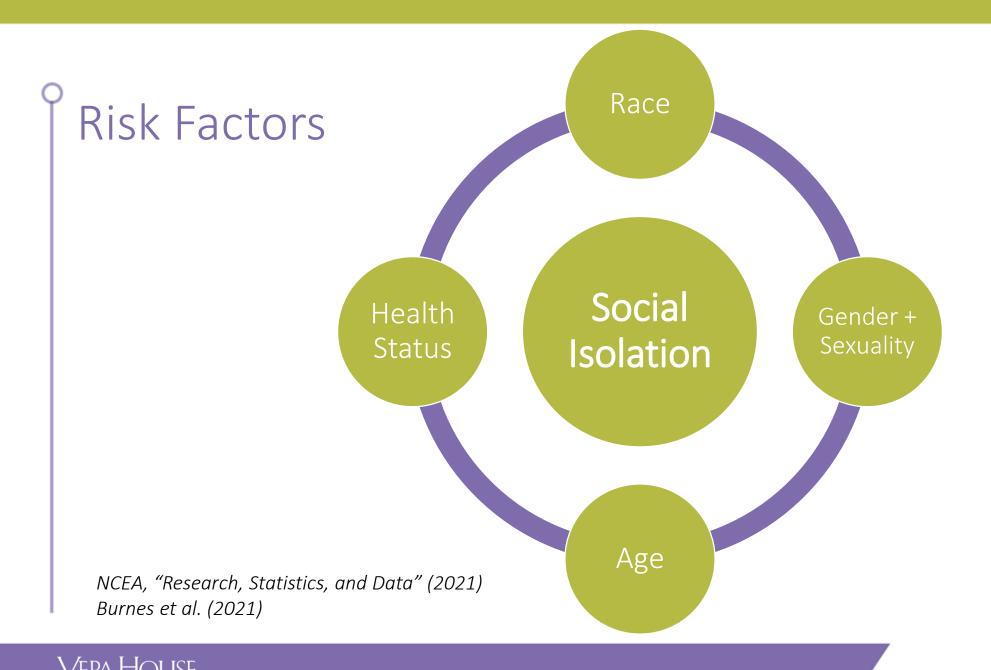
## Scope of the Problem

- 14.1% of people over 60 report having experienced at least one form of abuse
- Underreporting
  - For every 1 case reported, estimated 23 remain undisclosed

NYS Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (2011)











#### Ageism and Risk

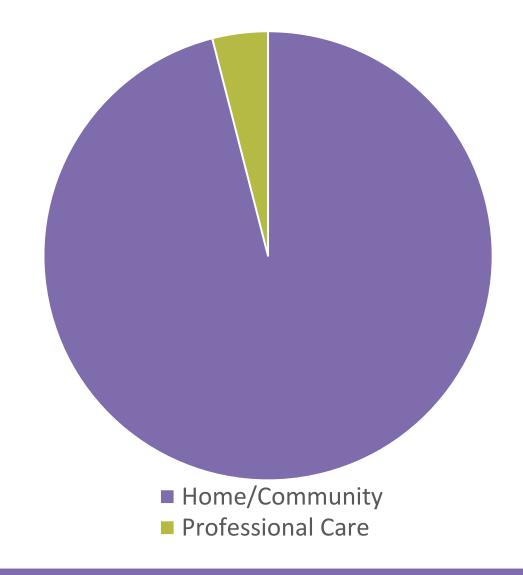
- Ageism: prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination based on age
  - Can underly abusive behavior
  - Keeps people from fully participating in our communities

NCEA, "Research Brief: Ageism" (2021)





Where does abuse occur?







#### Barriers to Seeking Help

#### Individual

Fear

Denial

Overwhelmed

**Ambivalence** 

Dependency

Grief

Anger

Depression

Embarrassment
Guilt/Shame
Loyalty

#### Social

Generational

values

Rigid gender

roles

Cultural values

Inequitable

experiences with

systems





The Cost

Individual

- Physical decline
- Mortality
- Negative psychological outcomes
- \$2.9 billion lost annually to financial exploitation
  - Loss of independence

Decreases participation of older adults in community life: community loses valuable contributions

Community

Society

- Financial exploitation:
   \$15 million in public costs
   annually in NYS
- National healthcare cost: \$5.3 billion







# Strengthening the Beams



## Know the Signs: Physical Red Flags

- Unexplained injuries (bruises, cuts, burns, broken bones, etc.)
  - Differing explanations from older adult v. caregiver
- Untreated bed sores
- Changes in physical appearance: hygiene, weight, dress
- Difficulty walking/standing
- Appearing under or over medicated

National Center on Elder Abuse, "Research, Statistics, and Data" (2021)





## Know the Signs: Emotional/Behavioral Red Flags

- Unusual changes in behavior or sleep
- Withdrawn, hopeless, or resigned affect
- Depression, anxiety, fear
- Differing behavior in the presence of the caregiver/caregiver speaking for the older adult
- Trauma symptoms v. dementia





## Know the Signs: Financial Red Flags

- Unusual changes in bank account/money management behaviors
- Missing checks, money, or belongings
- New debt
- Unpaid bills
- Unexplained or sudden change in Power of Attorney, wills, legal documents

National Center on Elder Abuse, "Research, Statistics, and Data" (2021)





## Person-Centered Support: Safety + Self-Determination

- Safety
  - Survivor as the expert of their own situation
  - No "one size fits all" solution
- Self-Determination
  - Restoring control to survivor



### Supportive Services: Office for Aging & APS

- Onondaga County Office for Aging: 315-435-2362
  - Information & Assistance
  - Caregiver Resources
  - Community Services
  - Senior Nutrition
  - Case Management
- Adult Protective Services: 315-435-2815
  - Investigates cases of suspected abuse/exploitation





#### Supportive Services: Vera House

- Dedicated elder advocate
  - Emotional support, safety planning, systems navigation
- Evergreen Support Group
- E-MDT
- 24-hour Crisis and Support Line: **(315) 468-3260**
- WebChat: www.verahouse.org





## Supportive Services: Concerned Persons Helpline

- Helpline dedicated to family members, friends, neighbors, or caregivers who are concerned about an older adult
- 844-746-6905
  - M-F, 9AM-5PM
  - Emotional support, resources, guidance on next steps





#### Prevention: Challenge Ageism

- Be aware of how ageism shows up in our attitudes, interactions, and the policies and systems around us
- Disrupt ageism when we see and hear it
  - "senior moment" v. "I forgot\_\_\_\_"
  - Challenging assumptions
  - Advocating for change

Gendron, "Recognizing and Combatting Ageism During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond" (2021)





#### Prevention: Increase Social Connection

- Reaching out & maintaining connections
  - Individualism v. Community
- Systems-level solutions:
  - More resources for community centers
  - Intergenerational programs
  - Improving public transportation
  - Digital access

Frameworks Institute, "Talking Elder Abuse"





## Conclusion



Aging is natural... Abuse is not





#### Sources

Frameworks Institute: Talking Elder Abuse https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkit/talking-elder-abuse/

NYS Elder Abuse Prevalence Study

https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/aps/Under-the-Radar-2011May12.pdf

NCEA Research, Statistics, and Data

https://ncea.acl.gov/About-Us/What-We-Do/Research/Statistics-and-Data.aspx#risk\_factors

NCEA The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study 1998 https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2016-09/ABuseReport Full.pdf

NCEA Research Brief on Ageism

https://ncea.acl.gov/NCEA/media/Publication/NCEA RB Ageism.pdf

The NYS Cost of Financial Exploitation Study https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/aps/Cost-of-Financial-Exploitation-Study-2016May.pdf

Administration for Community Living

https://acl.gov/news-and-events/acl-blog/elder-abuse-public-health-issue-affects-all-us-0

Burnes et al., (2021) Estimated Incidence and Factors Associated With Risk of Elder Mistreatment in New York State <a href="https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2782989?resultClick=1">https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2782989?resultClick=1</a>

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