

ELDER ABUSE 101: A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

Vera House
Jenny Ackley, Project Coordinator – Abuse in Later Life Grant

Vision and Mission of the Elder Justice Committee

VISION

A **just society** that treats elders with respect

MISSION

To prevent elder abuse and **promote elder justice** through collaboration, advocacy, education and intervention.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IS FOR ALL, NO MATTER YOUR AGE

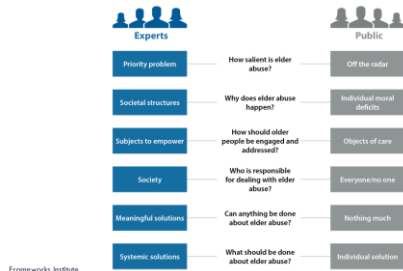


Words have power

- Lessons from the Sexual Violence movement
 - Sexual Violence
 - Victims to Survivors – less stigma; better understanding by their support system
 - Rape Culture
 - #MeToo
 - So what about Elder Abuse?

Perception – Experts vs. Public

Mapping the Gaps



How to talk about Elder Abuse?

Instead of:	Try:
Appealing to sympathy	Appealing to Justice: This is about treating older people fairly
Talking about vulnerable populations and dependent victims	Talking about the importance of social connections to empower older people and reduce risk factors
Using crisis laden or emotional rhetoric to condemn elder abuse	Demonstrating the collective—social and economic—costs of elder abuse
Relying on the public's limited conception of abuse as a two-person relationship	Intentionally expanding the definition of abuse to include self-neglect, sexual abuse, and systemic causes
Focusing only on individual perpetrators and victims	Explaining the underlying social conditions that can increase risk factors
The terms "perpetrators" and "victims"	Try less swamy language like "people who commit elder abuse" and "survivors"
Using data and expert jargon to explain the causes and consequences of elder abuse	Using the Social Structure metaphor: Society is like a building. Let's improve it with support beams that can keep everyone safe.
Providing solutions that emphasize individual responsibility	Providing solutions that emphasize collective responsibility and systemic/policy changes
Descriptions of the problem	Telling a complete story: Why it matters, how it works, and what can be done to address the problem

Frameworks Institute

Broken Trust: Dot

Maine Public Broadcasting Network



Dot's Case

Agencies Involved

- Social worker:** Met Dot at a mental health agency
- Health care:** For in-home rehab
- Law Enforcement**
- Bank:** Dot's daughter's friend worked at the bank

Not Involved

- APS:** Never contacted

Dot's Case: Outcome

- ❑ **Social worker:** Provided support
 - ❑ **Health care:** Knew of abuse but did not report or help
 - ❑ **Law Enforcement:**
 - ❑ Interviewed Dot in her daughter's presence
 - ❑ Told her how lucky she was to have a daughter who kept her at home rather than in a nursing home
 - ❑ No charges, investigation or prosecution
 - ❑ **Bank:** Helped the daughter get her name on Dot's accounts
- Result:** *Dot lost everything including her home*

Let's analyze this case

What does the public see?

- ❑ Dot
- ❑ Daughter
- ❑ Institutions

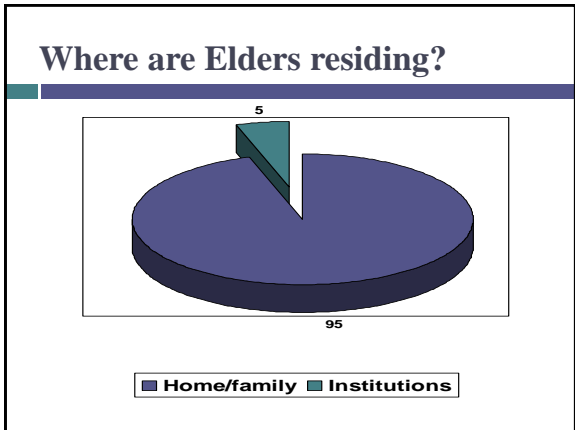
What would experts see?

- ❑ Social issue
- ❑ Lack of systems resources
- ❑ Need for collaborative response

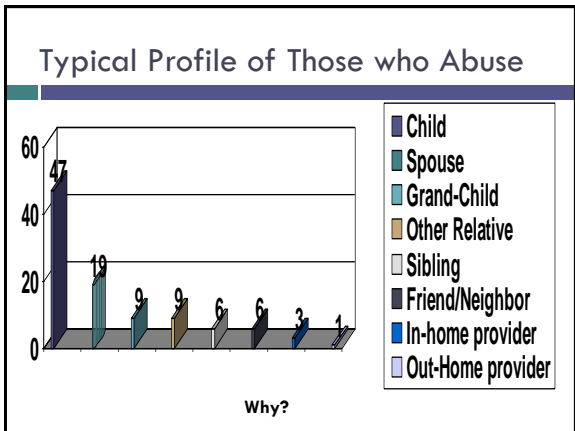
Did Dot receive justice?

Abuse in Later Life as a Subset of Elder Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Sexual Assault





- ### Typical Survivor Profile
- Often women
 - Usually over 75
 - 80 years and older - abused at 3 times more than rest of population.
 - Chronic health problems requiring some form of assistance
 - Those with dementia close to 50% experience some kind of abuse
 - Live with the abuser
 - Isolated / Depression
- Why? What should we do?**



Those who abuse tend to:

- Have drug/alcohol or gambling problems
- Be dependent on victim for financial support
- Have a history of domestic violence
- Be ill prepared or reluctant to provide care
- Resistant to outside help
- Be over the age of 50
- Abusive family member
 - usually adult son, spouse, or someone in trust

Elder Abuse - Types

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

Indicators of Abuse

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns
- Differing explanations from caregiver and patient
- Doctor hopping
- Differing behavior in presence of caregiver/caregiver speaking for patient
- Depression/ Anxiety / Paranoia
- Sense of hopelessness/ resignation

Indicators of Abuse

- Difficulty walking/standing
- Pressure sores
- Change in hygiene, weight
- Over/under medicated
- Missing funds, new credit card accounts
- Changed wills, healthcare proxies, power of attorney
- Caregiver over concerned about finances

Elder Abuse: Emotional Barriers

- Fear
- Denial
- Discouragement
- Embarrassment
- Guilt/Shame
- Overwhelmed
- Ambivalence
- Grief
- Generational values
- Rigid gender roles
- Strong cultural values
- Dependency
- Loyalty
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Depression

Collaboration: Who Might be Involved

The diagram consists of nine interlocking puzzle pieces arranged in a roughly rectangular shape. Each piece is a different color and contains text identifying a group or role:

- Faith Leaders** (Green piece, top left)
- Adult Protective Agencies** (Blue piece, middle left)
- Private Law Firm** (Pink piece, bottom left)
- Advocates** (Purple piece, top middle)
- Health Professionals** (Magenta piece, center)
- Ombudsman** (Orange piece, bottom middle)
- Aging Network** (Orange piece, top right)
- Friends** (Light Purple piece, middle right)
- Family** (Light Blue piece, bottom right)

Adult Protective Services (APS)

- Investigations are to be commenced within 24 hours (life threatening) or 72 hours (non-threatening).
Determination as to qualification for services is to be made within 60 days.
- Mandate is to make sure client is safe and/or assist in obtaining any variety of services to make client safe while acknowledging client's right to **self-determination** and **ability to refuse assistance**.
- At the end of investigation, case is either opened or rejected and will remain open until the risk is removed.

Mandatory Reporting

- New York State is the only state that does not have mandatory reporting for Elder Abuse, **but anyone can voluntarily report**
 - NYS Social Services Law provides civil immunity if reporting in good faith
 - Financial institutions encouraged to report by NYS and Federal Government
 - HIPAA privacy rule permits disclosure to Adult Protective Services

Office of the Aging

- Information & Assistance
- Caregiver Resources
- Community Services
- Senior Nutrition
- Case Management



Vera House

- Provides confidential services for women, children and men who are victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault
- 24/7 Crisis and Support Line – supports all languages
- Shelter
- Advocacy
 - Safety planning
 - Domestic Violence Education and Support Groups
 - Assistance navigating the legal system
 - Linkages to community resources including financial assistance, mental health providers, culturally specific programs, housing options, home care options, disability service providers
 - Elder Advocate since 2014
- Counseling for sexual assault
- Enhanced Multidisciplinary Team (E-MDT)

NCALL, OVVW (2012)

Elder Abuse as a Social Justice Issue

- “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.”

- Source: Frameworks Institute: Strengthening the Support: How to Talk about Elder Abuse

Aging is Natural, Abuse is Not



Sources:

- Frameworks Institute – Strengthening the Support: How to Talk about Elder Abuse, January 2016
- <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/elderabuse/>

NCALL OVV (2012)
