

Understanding

Elder Maltreatment

Fact Sheet

2009

Elder maltreatment includes several types of violence that occur among those ages 60 and older. The violence usually occurs at the hands of a caregiver or a person the elder trusts. There are six types of elder maltreatment:

- **Physical**—This occurs when an elder is injured as a result of hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, burning, or other show of force.
- **Sexual**—This involves forcing an elder to take part in a sexual act when the elder does not or cannot consent.
- **Emotional**—This refers to behaviors that harm an elder's self-worth or emotional well being. Examples include name calling, scaring, embarrassing, destroying property, or not letting the elder see friends and family.
- **Neglect**—This is the failure to meet an elder's basic needs. These needs include food, housing, clothing, and medical care.
- **Abandonment**—This happens when a caregiver leaves an elder alone and no longer provides care for him or her.
- **Financial**—This is illegally misusing an elder's money, property, or assets.



Why is elder maltreatment a public health problem?

Elder maltreatment is a serious problem in the United States. There is a lack of data but what we do know is that:

- In 1996, 551,000 persons ages 60 and older were the victim of elder abuse, neglect, and/or self-neglect in domestic settings.¹

Many cases are not reported because elders are afraid to tell police, friends, or family about the violence. Victims have to decide: tell someone they are being hurt or continue being abused by someone they depend upon or care for deeply.



How does elder maltreatment affect health?

Elder maltreatment can have several physical and emotional effects on an elder.

Many victims suffer physical injuries. Some are minor like cuts, scratches, bruises, and welts. Others are more serious and can cause lasting disabilities. These include head injuries, broken bones, constant physical pain, and soreness. Physical injuries can also lead to premature death and make existing health problems worse.^{2,3,4,5}

Elder maltreatment can have emotional effects as well. Victims are often fearful and anxious. They may have problems with trust and be wary around others.²



Who is at risk for elder maltreatment?

Several factors can increase the risk that someone will hurt an elder. However, having these risk factors does not always mean violence will occur.

Some of the risk factors for hurting an elder include:

- Using drugs or alcohol, especially drinking heavily
- High levels of stress
- Lack of social support
- High emotional or financial dependence on the elder
- Lack of training in taking care of elders
- Depression



