Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Topics
- Introduction
- Elders
- Elder Abuse
- Why?
- Types of Abuse
- Prevention
- Resources
- Credits

Introduction

What do I know about elder abuse?

I didn’t know ...people abused elders.

Elder Abuse
The Hidden Crime

In Maine?

Do I know an elder who is abused?
What do you know about elder abuse? Are the following questions true or false? Click on the correct answer for each.

- Most elder abuse occurs in institutions.  
  - T  
  - F

- Substance abuse by elders is rare.  
  - T  
  - F

- Elders are often dependent on their abuser for care.  
  - T  
  - F

- It is easy to identify elder abuse.  
  - T  
  - F

- Given resources, most elders will report abuse.  
  - T  
  - F

- Aging is stigmatized in America.  
  - T  
  - F
What do you know about elder abuse? Are the following questions true or false? Click on the correct button.

- Most elder abuse occurs in institutions.  
- Substance abuse by elders is rare.  
- Elders are often dependent on their abuser for care.  
- It is easy to identify elder abuse.  
- Given resources, most elders will report abuse.  
- Aging is stigmatized in America.

How did you do on that quiz? Would you like to learn more? Click on the next button.
This lesson is an interactive opportunity to learn more about the hidden crime of elder abuse in Maine and in America.

Complete this lesson to learn more about

- the victim’s lives.
- the circumstances of their abuse.
- what can be done to help victims of elder abuse.

The development of this lesson was made possible by funding from the Maine Community Policing Institute

Learning Objectives
**Learning Objectives:**

After completing this lesson, the community member will be able to:

- Differentiate myth from fact in 6 statements about elder abuse.
- Differentiate between negative and positive images of aging.
- Identify 4 elders who are vulnerable to abuse.
- Identify 3 risk factors that contribute to elder abuse.
- Recognize at least 5 signs of abuse or neglect.
- Identify 3 barriers that prevent many older people from reporting abuse.
- Identify 2 community resources that are used to report suspected elder abuse.
Navigating this lesson is easy. Just learn the following icons and follow any additional directions that are given to you.

The locator line will tell you where you are within each topic.

- Will take you to your law enforcement agency home page
- Will take you to Community Safety Center Index Page

To move to any topic, click on it in the Topics list on the left.
- Will take you to the previous screen.
- Will take you to the next screen.
- Will take you to more information.
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Elders In Our Communities

Are Elders Respected in America?
What Challenges Do Elders Face?
Who is Vulnerable to Elder Abuse?
Are Elders Respected in America?

How elders are treated by other people depends on the cultural view of aging.

➢ People fear aging in the United States; being old is not viewed as a desirable state.

➢ There are prevalent negative attitudes about elders such as “no longer physically attractive”, “unproductive”, “overly use health care funds”, “sickly”, and “inconvenient”.

➢ It is difficult for many people to recognize any advantage of being older in our culture; some are unable to appreciate the contributions previously and currently made by elders.
Many views of aging in America are marred by stereotyping the aging process. Can you identify those stereotypes? Click on those pictures that portray aging negatively!
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

The Stigma of Aging in America

Click on those pictures that portray aging negatively!

- This is a negative image of an older woman who has blue hair.
- This is a negative image of an elderly couple talking on the phone.
- This is a negative image of a man who is old, unfocused and sleepy.
- This is a negative image of a woman who is old, wrinkled and cranky.
- This is a negative image of an older woman who is unwell and maybe unproductive.
- This is a positive image of an older woman reading to a young girl.
- This is a positive image of son talking to an aging parent.
- This is a positive image of a man who is old, unfocused and sleepy.
It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people recognize when elders are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.
It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Isolation** is common among elders who are frail, chronically ill, widowed or divorced and live alone. They do not participate in activities with other people.
What Challenges do Elders Face?

It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Depression** in elders is not easily recognized and when it exists, it maybe due to a medical condition or a psychological condition. Suicide is more common in older people than in any other age group.
It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Self neglect** occurs when elders fail to provide themselves with whatever is necessary to prevent physical or emotional harm or pain. This occurs for a variety of complicated reasons including physical or mental deterioration and their reluctance to ask for help.
What Challenges do Elders Face?

It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Medications** must be used wisely. Elders are at risk to misuse medications because they may be taking a number of prescriptions that could interact with each other. They also may use other substances such as alcohol.
It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Dementia** is a medical condition that affects the way the brain works. It affects all aspects of mind and behavior, including memory, judgment, language, concentration, visual perception, temperament, and social interactions. Dementia is not a normal outcome of aging.
It is true that as people age they face many challenges, however, not all elders face every challenge. It is important that people around elders recognize when they are faced with a challenge and provide the necessary assistance or supports.

**Substance abuse** is more common among elders than most people realize. In some cases it may be a long standing problem. In others it may be that the elder turned to drugs and/or alcohol to cope with challenges of isolation or physical pain.
Who Is Vulnerable to Elder Abuse?

Elders are people older than 65 years. Elders who are abused frequently have three things in common.

• **Older**: usually among the oldest of the elders, often over 75 years.
• **Frail**: physically and/or mentally frail or unwell.
• **Dependent** upon other people (caregivers, paid staff, family members) for their care.
Elders in Our Community

Unlike many other cultures, the U.S. stigmatizes the aging process. Elders in the U.S. are not always respected for the wisdom and experience they have gained while aging.

Aging can bring challenges due to physical and mental changes that occur in some people. However, it is important to remember that most people age gracefully and are faced with minimal challenges.

Some of the elderly are vulnerable to abuse. They are usually the oldest of the elderly population, unwell and/or frail, and dependent on others for their care.
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Elder Abuse In Our Communities

- Who Are The Victims?
- How Often Does Abuse Happen?
- What is Abuse?
- Where Does It Occur?
- Who Are The Abusers?
Who Are the Victims of Elder Abuse?

The aging population in the United States is growing and many of these elders continue to live in a family setting with relatives. People over 65 represent over 15% of the population in Maine.

About 7% of male and 17% of female elders live with their children, siblings, or other relatives and not with a spouse. The number who live in family settings decreases with age. As elders become more frail they may require a residential setting that offers nursing assistance.

Elders who have reached a point where they can no longer live independently are particularly vulnerable to mistreatment by family, caregivers or others.
How Often Does It Happen?

It is estimated that approximately 1 million cases of elder abuse occur annually in the United States.

Characteristics of Abused Elders

- The median age of an abused elder is 78 years.
- 66% Caucasian; 19% African-American, 10% Hispanic, less than 1% Native American/Alaskan Native.
- 68% female; 32% male.
Elder abuse generally refers to any form of maltreatment of an older person by someone who has a special relationship with the elder.
Broadly defined, there are three basic categories of elder abuse.

**Domestic Elder Abuse** is any form of abuse that occurs either in the older person’s home or in the home of the caregiver.

**Institutional Elder Abuse** is any form of abuse of an elder that occurs in residential facilities.

**Self-Neglect or Self-Abuse** is when the elder is unable or unwilling to care for self; it occurs in any setting, although most frequently in a domestic setting.
Elder abuse is any form of maltreatment of an older person by someone who has a special relationship with the elder.

**Domestic Elder Abusers** are spouses, siblings, children, friends, or caregivers. Adult children are the largest category of abusers (47%) followed by spouses (19%), other relatives (9%), and grandchildren (8%). In over 90% of elder abuse cases in Maine, the abuser was a relative.

**Institutional Elder Abusers** include paid caregivers. This abuse generally occurs in nursing homes, foster homes, group homes and board and care facilities by persons who have a legal or contractual obligation to provide the elder with care and protection.
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.
Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.

Alice, 72, lives in a residential care home that has high staff turnover. Alice had a stroke 3 years ago and requires assistance to dress, to walk, and to eat. She has some difficulty talking since the stroke. Is she vulnerable for abuse?   YES   NO
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.

Alfred, 80, has been depressed since his wife died 6 months ago. Despite taking numerous medications he has been drinking more and more heavily. His only son has become quite frustrated with his father’s drinking and depression. Is Alfred vulnerable for abuse?  

YES   NO
Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.

Vera, 92, lives independently in the home she and her deceased husband built 45 years ago. She visits regularly with her family and friends, volunteers at the community center, and plays Beano every Thursday night. Is Vera vulnerable for abuse? YES NO
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.

Julio, 70, lives with his nephew in the nephew’s family home. He immigrated to the U.S. 35 years ago and built a dry cleaning and alteration business that is now managed by the nephew. Julio continues to work on occasion but has a hard time concentrating and often asks the nephew to take him “home to Cuba”. Is Julio vulnerable for abuse?  YES  NO
Marie, 83, lives with her daughter and son-in-law and is bedridden. Unfortunately, there are no funds for in-home assistance. Marie's daughter and son-in-law are both employed outside the home. Every evening Marie's daughter finds that she must change and bathe her mother no matter how tired she feels. Is Marie vulnerable for abuse?   YES   NO
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Which of these Elders are Vulnerable?

Click on each picture to learn more about these elders. Identify the four elders who are vulnerable to abuse. Click Next when you have completed the exercise.

James, 78, has lived with his son for the past 10 years. He is a retired police officer and is currently employed part time as a security officer at a warehouse. He believes that he is a burden on his son; therefore, he is seeking an apartment in a residence for seniors. Is James vulnerable for abuse?  YES  NO
Why Does Abuse Happen?

Caregiver Stress
Impairment of Dependent Elder
Family Cycle of Violence
Personal Problems of Abusers
Caring for frail elders is difficult and stress-producing. It is even more difficult if the caregivers have additional stressors in their lives. Caregivers find themselves overwhelmed by the responsibility of taking care of an older person. They can feel guilty about their frustration and/or their inability to provide necessary resources. This is particularly true when any of the following conditions are present:

- Elder is mentally impaired.
- Elder is physically impaired.
- Caregiver is ill-prepared for the task of caring for a frail older person.
- Necessary resources are lacking.
Impairment of Dependent Elder

Research has demonstrated that elders who are in poor health are more likely to be abused than those in good health.

Abuse tends to occur when the stress level of the caregiver increases as the elder’s impairment worsens. This is particularly true when the caregiver is not prepared to give the level of care that is required by the impairment.
Some families are more prone to violence than others. Violence is a learned behavior that is transmitted from one generation to another.

In these families, abusive behavior is the normal response to tension or conflict. They resort to violence because they have not learned any other ways to respond to stressful situations or conflict.
Abusers of the elderly (typically adult children) tend to have more personal problems than do non-abusers. Because of these problems, these adult children are often dependent on the elders for their support.

Adult children who abuse their parents frequently have problems such as:

- Mental and Emotional Disorders
- Alcoholism
- Drug Addiction
- Financial Problems

Alcohol is involved in nearly 50% of the reported elder abuse cases.
Click on the three situations with risk factors that contribute to elder abuse.

- Jack, 79, lives with his 55 year old daughter who has alcoholism.
- Joline checks on her independent, but elderly mother everyday after work.
- Robert cares for his father who now has dementia; his father was abusive to Robert as a child.
- Janet, mother of 5 children, also cares for her 89 year old bedridden mother.
Click on the three situations with risk factors that contribute to elder abuse.

- Jack, 79, lives with his 55 year old daughter who has alcoholism.
- Joline checks on her independent, but elderly mother everyday after work.
- Robert cares for his father who now has dementia; his father was abusive to Robert as a child.
- Janet, mother of 5 children, also cares for her 89 year old bedridden mother.

- Yes! Caregiver with personal problems
- No! There is no apparent risk here.
- Yes! Family history of violence
- Yes! Impairment of Dependent Elder
Types of Elder Abuse

There are a number of ways that elders can be abused.

Elder abuse isn’t easily identified.

There are physical signs and behavior changes that can indicate the possibility of abuse.

In some cases the abuse may be recognized by the behavior of the caregiver.
Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is using physical force that causes bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. May include such acts as striking, hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching and burning. Also includes inappropriate use of medication and restraints.

**Physical Signs:** bruises, black eyes, welts, rope marks, fractures, sprains, broken eyeglasses, medication overdoses, signs of being restrained.

**Behavioral Signs:** elder’s report of abuse, fearful behavior, other sudden changes in behavior.

**Caregiver Sign:** refusal to allow visitors to see the elder alone.
Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is sexual contact of any kind with a non-consenting elderly person. Sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent is also considered sexual abuse. This includes unwanted touching, rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, and sexually explicit photographing.

Physical Signs: bruising or other trauma, unexplained sexually transmitted diseases, unexplained sexually transmitted infections, torn or stained underclothing.

Behavioral Signs: elder’s report of being sexually assaulted or raped.

Caregiver Signs: flirtations, coyness can be possible indicators of inappropriate sexual relationship.
Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse is inflicting anguish, pain or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts such as verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, and harassment. In addition, treating an older person like an infant; isolating the person from the family, friends, or regular activities; and enforcing social isolation may be emotional/psychological abuse.

Behavioral Signs: being upset or agitated; withdrawn, non-communicative or non-responsive; unusual sucking, biting, rocking behaviors; elder’s report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated.

Caregiver Signs: attitudes of indifference or anger, blaming the victim, unwarranted defensiveness. Threatens, harasses, insults the elder.
Neglect-The Most Frequent Type of Elder Abuse

Neglect is the refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person’s obligations or duties to an elder. May include failure of a person who has financial responsibility to provide care for an elder or the failure of an in-home service provider to provide necessary care. Typically means failure to provide life necessities such as water, clothing, food, shelter, personal hygiene, medicine, comfort, personal safety and other essentials.

**Physical Signs**: dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, poor personal hygiene, untreated health problems, hazardous or unsafe living conditions, unsanitary or unclean living conditions.

**Behavioral Signs**: elder’s report of being mistreated or neglected.
Abandonment-The Least Common Abuse

Abandonment is the desertion of a person by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care for an elder, or by a person with physical custody of an elder.

**Physical Signs**: desertion of an elder at a hospital, nursing facility, other institution, shopping center, other public locations.

**Behavioral Signs**: elder’s own report of being abandoned or deserted.

**Caregiver Signs**: unable to explain absence of elder.
Select 5 signs of elder abuse or neglect.

- Bruises
- Good Hygiene
- Withdrawn
- Caregiver Denial
- Healthy
- Elder Report
- Desertion at a hospital
- Content
Select 5 signs of elder abuse or neglect.
Preventing Elder Abuse

Understanding the Barriers

Public Education

What Can You Do?
Understanding the Barriers

Elders often don’t report their abuse because they:

- are dependent on the abuser.
- fear backlash from the abuser.
- fear losing contact with a family member.
- feel guilt about their need for care.
- feel ashamed that their child or spouse is an abuser.
- are afraid they will be placed into institutional care.
- don’t believe that their problem is important enough.
- are unaware of the resources for victims of abuse.
Public Education

*People need to know that elder abuse is a crime.*

- Recognize that the treatment of elders they know may be unacceptable or even criminal.
- Anyone can report suspected elder abuse.
- Laws make it mandatory for many professionals to report elder abuse.
- Resources are available for reporting abuse and assisting the victims of elder abuse.
What Can You Do About Elder Abuse?

- Be aware of the signs of abuse.
- Listen and talk to elders in private. Let them know that you care and are willing to help them.
- Verify any information from the caregiver that the elder “is confused”.
- Know the resources that are available to help victims.
- Be willing to make the report if the elder is too frightened or otherwise unable to report the abuse themselves.
- Recommend that your friends and family view this lesson and use the Community Safety Center for information and resources.
Select the three situations with barriers that may prevent many older people from reporting abuse.

Elizabeth, 72, lives with son’s family. Son is easily frustrated by Elizabeth’s need for help to eat and sometimes he doesn’t feed her. He is a town official.

Gladys, 80, shares her home with her grandson and his verbally abusive wife. She helps to care for their two children while parents are working. She enjoys her time with her great-grandchildren.

Robert, 93, lives in his own apartment attached to his daughter’s house. He is independent. In fact, some say that he helps daughter Alice, 69, more than she is able to help him.

Ted, 77, lives with his son, James, 58. They often play cards and drink beer on weekends. It is not unusual for them to argue and yell at each other. Ted loves living at home with James.
Select three situations with barriers that may prevent many older people from reporting abuse.

Yes
She is ashamed that her son, a town official, is an abuser.

Yes
Fears potential loss of contact with great grandchildren.

No
No obvious problem or barrier.

Yes
Fear of backlash or move to residential care.
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

Resources: Elder Abuse

Law Enforcement
Adult Protective Services
Attorney General’s Office
Legal Services for the Elderly
Long Term Care Ombudsmen
If I make a report, what happens?

Your first point of contact may be either your law enforcement agency or the Bureau of Elder Adult Services (BEAS).
If your first point of contact is with a law enforcement agency serving your area, they will take basic information and tell you what you should do.

Many Maine law enforcement agencies have adopted a community policing philosophy and approach and work with multidisciplinary groups that address the problems of elder abuse.

Working with the Attorney General’s Office, over 100 departments have designated an Elder Crime Contact Officer who has received special training about crimes targeted at the elderly and other elder issues.

Click on Home for more information on contacting this law enforcement agency.
Elder Abuse: The Hidden Crime

In Maine, the Bureau of Elder and Adult Services provides or arranges for services to protect incapacitated and dependent adults (age 18 and over) in danger of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

To make a report or for more information, call:

- Nationwide 24-hour, toll-free: 1-800-624-8404
- TTY (during business hours): 1-800-624-8404
- TTY In-State (after hours): 1-800-963-9490
- TTY Out-of-State (after hours): 207-287-3492
The Maine Attorney General is committed to the protection of Maine’s elder citizens. The Office has a full time investigator to help facilitate the prevention, reporting, investigation and prosecution of elder abuse, elder neglect, and financial exploitation.

If you are aware of an elder who is being abused or exploited, the Attorney General’s Office recommends that you contact:

Maine Department of Human Service’s Adult Protective Hotline 1-800-624-8404.
Maine’s Legal Services for the Elderly

Provides free, high quality legal assistance to socially and economically needy Maine residents age 60 and older. Please contact:

Hotline: 1-800-750-5353 or 207-623-1797
This program investigates and resolves complaints made on behalf of residents of Maine’s nursing, boarding, and adult foster homes and recipients of home care. Any person may ask for assistance from the Ombudsmen Program on behalf of these individuals.

Maine Program:  
Telephone: 207-621-1079
Toll Free Statewide TTY: 1-800-499-0229
Select the two primary community resources that should be used to report suspected elder abuse.

- Law Enforcement Agency
- Hospital Emergency Services
- Next Door Neighbors
- Bureau of Elder and Adult Services
Select the two primary community resources that should be used to report suspected elder abuse.
This public education lesson supports the Maine Community Policing Institute's vision of “Building safer communities through education.” The goal of this lesson is to provide community members with basic information about Elder Abuse and the resources that are available in the State of Maine.