

U.S. Department of Justice

Information on Elder Abuse

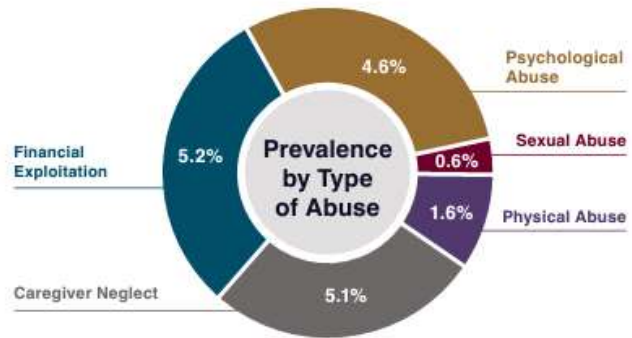


Elder Abuse

Is an intentional act or failure to act by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. It is a term under which five types of abuse are reflected.

Prevalence of Elder Abuse

At least 10% of adults age 60 and older will experience some form of elder abuse in a given year, with some older adults simultaneously experiencing more than one type of abuse.



The Consequences of Elder Abuse

The trauma of elder abuse may result in health issues like deterioration in health, hospitalization and increased mortality, clinical issues like depression and suicide, social issues like disrupted relationships, and financial loss, all leading to diminished independence and quality of life.

Red Flags of Elder Abuse

Warning signs of physical abuse

- Bruises, black eyes, welts, lacerations, or rope marks
- Bone fractures, broken bones, or skull fractures
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures, untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Sprains, dislocations, or internal injuries/bleeding
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, physical signs of being subjected to punishment, or signs of being restrained
- Laboratory findings of medication overdose or under-utilization of prescribed drugs
- An older adult's sudden change in behavior
- The caregiver's refusal to allow visitors to see or speak to an older adult alone
- An older adult's report of being hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated

Warning signs of emotional/psychological abuse

- Being emotionally upset or agitated
 - Being extremely withdrawn, non-communicative, or non-responsive
 - Unusual behavior, such as sucking, biting, rocking
 - Witnessing a caregiver controlling or isolating an older adult
 - Exhibiting a change in sleeping patterns or eating habits
 - Personality changes, such as apologizing excessively
 - Depression or anxiety
 - An older adult's report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated
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Warning signs of financial exploitation

- Sudden changes in bank accounts or banking practices, including an unexplained withdrawal of large sums of money by a person accompanying the older adult
 - The inclusion of additional names on an older adult's bank signature card
 - Unauthorized withdrawal of the older adult's funds using their ATM card
 - Abrupt changes in a will or other financial documents
 - Unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions
 - Provision of substandard care or bills left unpaid despite the availability of adequate financial resources
 - Discovery of a forged signature for financial transactions or for the titles of the older adult's possessions
 - Sudden appearance of previously uninvolved relatives claiming their rights to an older adult's property or possessions
 - Unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family
 - The provision of services that are not necessary
 - An older adult's report of financial exploitation
 - Unexplained credit card charges
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Warning signs of neglect and abandonment

- Dehydration, malnutrition, untreated bed sores, and poor personal hygiene
 - Unattended or untreated health problems
 - Hazardous or unsafe living conditions/arrangements (e.g., improper wiring, no heat, or no running water)
 - Unsanitary and unclean living condition (e.g., dirt, fleas, lice on person, soiled bedding, fecal/urine smell, inadequate clothing)
 - The desertion of an older adult at a hospital, a nursing facility, or other similar institution, or a shopping center or other public location
 - An older adult's report of being neglected or abandoned
 - Lack of food in the refrigerator or cupboards
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Warning signs of sexual abuse

- Bruises around the breasts or genital area
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding
- Changes in an older adult's demeanor, such as showing fear or becoming withdrawn when a specific person is around
- Evidence of pornographic material being shown to an older adult with diminished capacity
- Blood found on sheets, linens or an older adult's clothing
- An older adult's report of being sexually assaulted or raped

<https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/responding-elder-abuse-your-state> (graphic)

<https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/red-flags-elder-abuse> (warning signs)

Updated November 7, 2023