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## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

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# Elder Abuse

Special Feature

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## Overview

Elder abuse is a significant threat to the health and well-being of older adults worldwide.

Defined as an intentional or negligent act that causes harm or serious risk of harm to an older adult, [elder abuse](#) can include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse; financial exploitation; and neglect and abandonment.

Every year, June 15 is recognized as [World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#), an opportunity for communities to raise awareness about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

### How Common Is Elder Abuse?

Older adults can be especially vulnerable to financial, physical, and psychological abuse.

[The Elder Justice Roadmap](#), a research initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, indicates that 10% of adults over 60 in the United States experience some form of abuse each year. Studies have also shown that about two-thirds of elder abuse victims are women.

However, the prevalence of elder abuse may be much higher, as the Roadmap's research suggests that only one out of every 24 cases is reported.

### How Do Criminals Target Older Adults?

According to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) [2022 Elder Fraud Report](#), technology and customer support schemes are the most common type of fraud reported by older victims.

In 2022, victims over 60 reported more losses in call center scams than all other age groups combined, and victims reportedly remortgaged or foreclosed homes, emptied retirement accounts, and borrowed from family and friends to cover their losses.

Many cybercriminals targeting older adults through such scams are [based outside the U.S.](#), making this type of elder abuse more difficult to investigate.

Strangers do not just target victims of elder abuse. Family members, friends, and acquaintances can also use their relationships to defraud older Americans.

An [analysis](#) by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that 87.5% of older adults who were victims of financial mistreatment by someone they knew did not report the crime to law enforcement. Most victims did not report their family members or friends because they didn't want the perpetrator to get in trouble or they didn't want publicity.

## How to Prevent and Report Elder Abuse

Rigorous research on the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs for the abuse of older adults is limited.

One study supported by NIJ found that the [EMPOWER Program](#), a 12-week elder abuse prevention program for community-residing older adults, improved perceptions of home safety, physical health, social support, and financial well-being.

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) has several elder [fraud and abuse initiatives](#) dedicated to ensuring that older victims of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation have access to trauma-informed services and resources that protect their safety and confidentiality.

### BY THE NUMBERS IC3 Victims Over 60 by the Numbers



If you or someone you know 60+ has been a victim of fraud, call the National Elder Fraud Hotline

**NATIONAL ELDER  
FRAUD HOTLINE**  
1-833-FRAUD-11  
1-833-372-8311



Launched in 2020, the [National Elder Fraud Hotline](#) is a free resource created by OVC for people to report fraud against anyone age 60 or older. Callers are assigned a case manager who assists them in reporting the crime and connecting them with necessary resources.

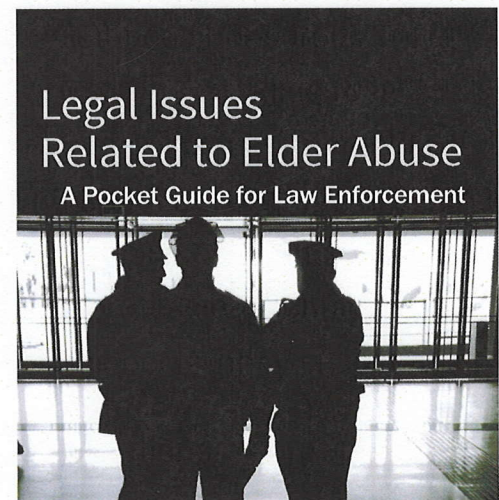
## Law Enforcement Response to Elder Abuse

Through the [Elder Justice Initiative](#), the Department of Justice is committed to combatting all forms of elder abuse and financial exploitation through enforcement actions, training and technical assistance resources, research, victim services, and public awareness.

Elder abuse is not an easy problem to address. The cases are often complex, requiring multiple resource systems to respond. Developing a multidisciplinary team (MDT) can be a solution for communities seeking to enhance their response to combat elder abuse and assist victims. Supported by OVC, the [National Elder Abuse MDT Training and Technical Assistance Center](#) provides case consultations, training, and technical assistance to MDTs nationwide.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance-sponsored [Legal Issues Related to Elder Abuse](#) pocket guide provides law enforcement officers with brief explanations of legal concepts, documents, and tools that may be misused to commit elder abuse. The guide also details issues and actions that justice system professionals may consider if they suspect elder abuse has occurred.

With support from OVC, the National White Collar Crime Center offers free training to support [older victims of financial exploitation and fraud](#). The on-demand training guides professionals through practices to detect, respond to, and assist victims of elder financial exploitation.



By Lori A. Stiegel, JD  
American Bar Association  
Commission on Law and Aging  
2014



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## More on Elder Abuse from OJP [↗](#)

Visit the following pages for additional information and resources produced or sponsored by the Office of Justice Programs and other federal agencies:



**KEN PAXTON**  
ATTORNEY GENERAL *of* TEXAS

## SENIOR TEXANS

# Elder Abuse

You have a right to be safe and protected from abuse. The Office of the Attorney General and the State of Texas are committed to protecting you from verbal, emotional and physical abuse, as well as financial exploitation, whether you are living in your own home, with family or in a long-term care facility.

Abuse includes involuntary seclusion, intimidation, humiliation, harassment, threats of punishment, deprivation, hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking, any type of corporal punishment, sexual assault, sexual coercion, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, or any oral, written, or gestured language that includes disparaging or derogatory terms, regardless of the person's ability to hear or comprehend.

Neglect means the failure of a caretaker to provide the goods or services, including medical services, which are necessary to avoid physical or emotional harm or pain.

Exploitation includes a caretaker's illegal use of a senior's resources for monetary or personal benefit, profit, or gain. Seniors may need help with their finances, but unless they hand control over to another person, they have the same right as anyone else to receive, spend, invest, save or give away their money. A family member, "friend" or nursing home may not take control of a senior's money without that person's permission.

If you are being abused, or suspect that someone else is being abused, do not remain silent. If you are aware of a specific act of abuse, neglect or exploitation, you are required by law to report it.

**If the victim is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local law enforcement agency.**

If the victim is in a nursing home or assisted living facility, or is in his or her home and relies on a home health provider, call the Texas Department of State Health Services at (800) 458-9858.

If the victim is a resident of a long-term care facility that receives Medicaid funding, report the criminal abuse, neglect or exploitation to the Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit at (512) 463-2011 (Austin), toll-free at (800) 252-8011 or by e-mail at [mfcu@texasattorneygeneral.gov](mailto:mfcu@texasattorneygeneral.gov).

Abuse of a senior who is not in a health care facility can be reported to Adult Protective Services at (800) 252-5400.

PO Box 12548  
Austin, TX 78711-2548

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## INFORMATION ON ELDER ABUSE

The abuse of older people is a worldwide recognised issue. Relationships of trust include family and friends of the older person but increasingly the relationship between community support workers, such as domiciliary nurses and home help, have come to be recognised as trusting in nature and are therefore covered by this definition.

### Overview of elder abuse

Elder abuse is located within the context of the Domestic and Family Violence paradigm which, along with child abuse and domestic violence, is underpinned by issues of power and control. There are similarities between the three domains of abuse but each stage of life needs its own framework for understanding and addressing specific issues. Research into elder abuse estimates that anywhere from 2.6% to 8% of older people experience some form of elder abuse in any one year; however this could be just the tip of the iceberg.

### Types and signs of elder abuse

- 1. Psychological (emotional, mental, verbal) abuse:** is the infliction of mental anguish, fear and feelings of shame and powerlessness. Behaviours include: verbal intimidation, humiliation, harassment, shouting, threats of various forms, withholding of affection and removal of decision-making powers. Signs include: Loss of interest in self and environment, passivity and apathy towards another person, fearfulness, lack of eye contact, ambivalence or nervousness around another person, reluctance to talk openly, helplessness and resignation.
- 2. Financial abuse:** is the illegal or improper use of an older person's finances or assets without their informed consent. Behaviours include: misappropriation of assets, money or valuables, forced changes to legal documents, the denial of access to personal funds, forging signatures, misuse of a bank card and misappropriation of an Enduring Power of Attorney. Signs include: loss of valuables, unprecedented transfer of funds, the improper attainment of Enduring Power of Attorney, loss of the bank card or a cheque book and the sudden inability to pay bills or purchase necessities.
- 3. Physical abuse:** is the infliction of physical pain, injury or force and the deprivation of liberty. Behaviours include: slapping, hitting, bruising, pushing and shoving, physically restraining and over & under medicating. Signs include: discrepancies between injury and explanation, burns, bruising, injuries at different stages of healing and being seen by different doctors or hospitals.
- 4. Social abuse:** is the intentional prevention of an older person from having social contact with family or friends or accessing social activities of their choice. Behaviours include: Moving the older person away from family and friends, forbidding access to visitors, denying the use of the phone or monitoring calls and cutting off activities without explanation and many other controlling behaviours. Signs include: Unexpected cancellation of services, non attendance at activities the person regularly attends, constant and close presence of the carer/family member, a high level of gate-keeping by the suspected abuser.
- 5. Sexual abuse:** is sexually abusive or exploitative behaviour or any behaviour that makes the older person feel uncomfortable about their body or gender. Behaviours include: rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, the use of sexually offending language and touching inappropriately. Signs include: bruising around genitals, unexplained venereal disease, torn/stained/bloody underclothes, bruising on the inner thighs, difficulty in walking or sitting, huddled and fear of being touched.
- 6. Neglect:** is the failure of a care giver to provide the necessities of life to a person for whom they are caring. Neglect can be unintentional or intentional. Both have the same adverse affect on the abused and cannot be excused or condoned. However, it is important to note the difference between the two types as it assists in choosing the most appropriate interventions.

Behaviours include: **Unintentional Neglect** - when a carer does not have the skills, knowledge or physical ability to care for the person or they lack knowledge of the supports available to them.

**Intentional Neglect** - when an older person is abandoned or not provided with adequate food, clothing or water or when there is a refusal by the carer to allow other people to provide necessary care. Signs include: malnourishment, dehydration, lack of social contact or activities, smelling of poor hygiene, clothing in poor state, colds and chills, lacking glasses, dentures or hearing aids, pressure sores, abandoned.