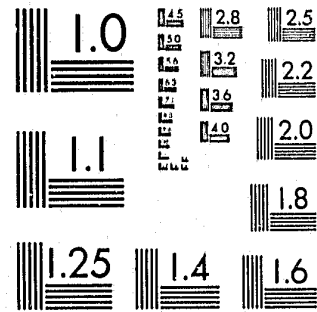


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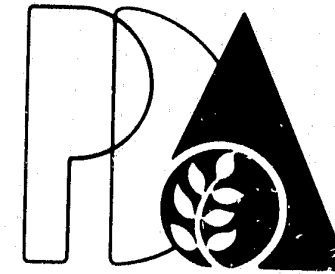
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National Institute of Justice
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ELDER ABUSE IN PENNSYLVANIA

A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY



PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING

JANUARY 1982

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ELDER ABUSE IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Department of Aging
Bureau of Advocacy
Executive Summary

Purpose and Methodology:

This report represents a preliminary overview of the information concerning older Pennsylvanians (aged 60+) who have been subjected to abuse during a twelve month period. The data for this report was gathered from a survey instrument completed by 1,138 respondents. The respondents represented fourteen occupational categories ranging from Administration to Volunteer level. The research was conducted from July 1980 through June 1981 throughout the Commonwealth. The following categories of information were collected:

- o occupation of those reporting abuse
- o characteristics of the abused elders
- o characteristics of the abusers
- o the agency's response to the abuse report
- o the nature of the abuse incident

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ACQUISITIONS

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the survey instruments were returned in useable form. Of those 1138 completed instruments 467 or 41% indicated personal knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse in the previous twelve (12) months.

When viewing the results of this survey it is most important to be aware of the following:

- o The data is descriptive only of the survey sample.
- o While an attempt was made to screen out duplicative reports of abuse, we cannot be certain that the 467 citations of abuse represent 467 individual cases of abuse.
- o This survey does not represent a random sampling of the population. Therefore the findings are not to be generalized beyond this data set.

Significant Findings:

1. Survey respondents reported and described in detail 467 citations of elder abuse occurring within a twelve month period.
2. The mean number of cases of abuse known about by those respondents reporting abuse was five (5). Respondents claimed knowledge of abuses ranging in number from a low of one (1) case to a high of sixty (60) cases occurring within the twelve (12) month reporting period.
3. Every occupational category surveyed indicated knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse. Protective service workers, homemakers,

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home health aides, and social workers accounted for a higher rate of abuse citations than other occupations.

4. The abuses tended to be reoccurring rather than single occurrences: 85% of the respondents who cited abuse reported that the abused elder being described had been abused more than twice previously.
5. Physical abuse was involved in 44% of the abuses cited by the respondents, 38% involved psychological abuse, 18% involved material abuse and 4% involved a violation of rights.
6. More victims of abuse were cited in the 70-79 year old age group than any other.
7. 76% of the elders abused were female, 23% were male.
8. In 85% of the citations the abused displayed a physical disability, in 71% of the citations, a mental disability was present in the abused.
9. In 69% of the citations the abused person lived with the abuser, and in 75% of the citations the abused and the abuser were related.
10. 67% of the respondents reported that the abuser was experiencing some form of stress. Most often cited were drug/alcohol abuse, medical problems, and financial problems.
11. In 61% of the occurrences of abuse the abused person was perceived as a source of stress to the abuser.
12. Agency responses to reported elder abuse were diverse, the most common responses included referral to another agency, provision of protective services, instigation of legal action, and removal of the abused from the situation.

Conclusion:

At this time the realities surrounding elder abuse in Pennsylvania are much the same as those in other states. There is little empirical data, the studies conducted on elder abuse have yielded only data of a descriptive nature. Due to the complexity of the issue, a definitive, scientific study of the issue has not been financially feasible.

The survey which preceded this report has been of significant impact as a step in the process of shedding light on the nature of elder abuse in Pennsylvania.

Prior to the accumulation of this data those individuals interested in the issue of elder abuse were forced to rely on their own experience or the experience of their immediate colleagues to develop a sense of the nature of the problem. As a result of the unselfish efforts of the participants in this survey it is now possible to discuss with a degree of confidence the dynamics of approximately 467 cases of elder abuse which occurred within the Commonwealth during a single twelve month

period. Further, it is now possible to provide professionals in the aging network with information descriptive of both the abused and the abusers involved in the previously noted 467 cases of abuse.

We are hopeful that this information will be of assistance to those involved in formulating responses to the problems created by elder abuse. In addition, the survey results will provide a level of documentation of the existence of elder abuse in Pennsylvania for use by those interested in establishing the undisputable need for remedies to the problems of abuse as well as strategies for the prevention of such abuse.

Recommendations:

We recommend a systematic approach to resolving the problems created or magnified by the existence of elder abuse. The response system should be flexible enough to accommodate the following components:

- o Continued research into the causes of elder abuse
- o Utilization of specialized protective service workers
- o Utilization of the least restrictive alternative
- o Utilization of family support systems
- o Increased visibility for protective services
- o Development of elder abuse prevention programs
- o The existence of alternative residences.

ELDER ABUSE IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Department of Aging
Bureau of Advocacy

The information contained in this report is based on data accumulated as a result of a survey conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. The survey involved contact with approximately two-thousand agencies and individuals routinely involved in providing services to older Pennsylvanians. Of those contacts, 1,138 resulted in completion of a comprehensive survey instrument. The research phase of this project began in July 1980 and was completed in June 1981.

Study Objectives:

The primary objective of this project was to preliminarily answer the question: "Does elder abuse occur in Pennsylvania?" Assuming an affirmative answer to that question, the survey instrument was designed to accumulate data on the nature of the occurring abuse situations. In addition, the instrument was used to discover the characteristics of those elders who have been abused as well as the characteristics of those persons who were the abusers.

Research Methodology:

The sole source of information for the purpose of this report was a comprehensive survey instrument disseminated by mail to a predetermined survey population.

The survey population was comprised of both professionals and non-professionals. The population included employees of private social service agencies, domestic violence shelters, Area Agencies on Aging, police departments, legal service agencies, mental health agencies, hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies. It also included those who are involved in senior centers and clubs.

In those instances where the category was small enough to allow it, survey instruments were given to all representatives of the category (e.g. Area Agencies on Aging). In those categories which were comprised of large numbers of representatives (e.g. police departments) a random selection process was used to determine which representatives would be chosen to complete the instrument.

Once the sample population had been established and the survey instrument completed, a pretest of the project questionnaire was conducted. The pre-test involved a group of professionals including Visiting Nurses, Home Health aides and direct service providers. Subsequent to evaluation of the survey pretest, minor modifications were made to the instrument.

Then, in July 1980, survey instruments were mailed to approximately two-thousand agencies and individuals. During October 1980 a second mailing of the instrument was made to those who failed to respond to the first mailing.

Ultimately, the survey population was set at one thousand one hundred and thirty eight (1,138). The survey site became the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Research findings:

Prior to any discussion of the survey results it must be clearly understood that the findings are applicable only to the survey population. Extrapolation of the findings to include the general public will not be legitimate because of the nature of the selection process used to determine the sample population.

It is, however, most important to note that the findings of this study tend to mirror the findings of those studies conducted throughout the nation. For that reason, we are confident that in addition to being descriptive of the sample population, the findings are also suggestive of the nature of elder abuse in ways which may be universally applicable.

For the purpose of this study, elder abuse was defined as " The willful infliction upon a person aged sixty or older, of physical pain, injury or debilitating mental anguish, unreasonable confinement or willful deprivation, by a caretaker, of services which are necessary to maintain mental or physical health.

Sample population:

As previously mentioned, the Department of Aging's statewide mail survey resulted in a total of 1,138 completed instruments.

The respondents completing the survey instrument were representatives of fourteen (14) occupational categories. The distribution of the respondents by category is shown on Table 1. In addition, Table 1 also shows the number of respondents in each occupational category which reported knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse in the past twelve (12) months.

Table 1
Sample Population by Occupation of Respondent

Occupation	No. of Respondents	% of Sample Population	No. of Respondents Reporting Abuse
1. Homemaker/Home Health Aide (Adm)	63	5.54%	36
2. Homemaker/Home Hlth Aide/Soc Wkr	128	11.25%	74
3. Casework supv/Soc Serv. Director	34	2.99%	22
4. Police	207	18.19%	20
5. Mental Health Adm/ Case Managers	78	6.85%	33
6. Hospital Admin.	49	4.31%	19
7. Hospital Soc. Wk/ Dr./Nurse	45	3.95%	23
8. Domestic Violence Workers	29	2.55%	23
9. Private Soc. Serv. Agency Staff	59	5.18%	24
10. Nursing Home Wkr & Administrators	128	11.25%	22
11. Attorneys/Para-legals	59	5.18%	42
12. Sr. Citizen Club Presidents	55	4.83%	6
13. Sr. Center Staff	86	7.56%	23
14. Protective Serv. Caseworkers	118	10.37%	100
TOTAL	1138	100%	467

Reports of Abuse:

Of the 1,138 respondents noted above and on Table 1, 467 or 41.04 percent of the sample population reported having personal knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse (as previously defined) within the 12 months prior to completion of the survey instrument.

The exact information on the number of respondents reporting knowledge of elderly abuse is displayed on Table 2.

Table 2

Reports on Abuse	Number	% of Pop.
Respondents with knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse	467	41.04%
Respondents without knowledge of a case of elder abuse	671	58.96%
Total Sample Population	1138	100%

In addition to simply indicating the presence of knowledge of a case of elder abuse, each positive respondent was asked to indicate the total number of cases of elder abuse which had come to his/her attention in the past year. The results of that question revealed that respondents had knowledge of cases of abuse ranging in number from one (1) case to sixty (60) cases. From that information we were able to establish a mean of five (5) for the number of cases of abuse known about by each respondent who reported knowledge of a case of abuse.

Categories of Abuse:

Those respondents with knowledge of a case of abuse were asked to determine which of four categories of abuse were involved in the occurrence. The distribution of those determinations are displayed on Table 3.

Table 3

Categories of Abuse

Category	Percent of reported cases involving this type of abuse (N=467)
Physical abuse	44.29%
Psychological abuse	38.44%
Material abuse	13.27%
Violation of rights	4.00%

The respondents were also asked to specify whether the case of abuse being described was intentional or the result of neglect. The resultant information is shown on Table 4.

Table 4
Nature of Abuse - Intention vs. neglect

Category	Number	Percent of Reported Cases
Intentional	239	51.18%
Neglect	130	27.84%
Unknown	90	20.98%
Total	467	100%

Table 5 shows the information that was reported with regard to the number of times that the older person involved in the case at hand had been abused previously.

Table 5

Number of times that this older person has been abused previously

No. of times abused previously	No. of Cases	% of Total
Once	27	5.78%
Twice	25	5.35%
More than twice	396	84.80%
Unknown	19	4.07%
Total	467	100%

The respondents were asked to list the types of services which were required by the abused person as a result of the abuse. Table 6 shows the distribution of that information.

Table 6
Services required as a result of the abuse

Category of Service	% of abused requiring service
Medical treatment	50.11%
Protective Services	44.97%
Legal Services	29.55%
Alternative Living Placement	38.00%
Counseling	26.00%
Homemaker service	39.00%
Social Services	36.00%

Table 7 serves as a comprehensive display of the information gathered concerning the characteristics of the abused person described by the respondents.

Table 7
Characteristics of Abused Elders

<u>Sex:</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Pop</u>
Female	357	76.45%
Male	108	23.13%
Not Reported	2	.42%

<u>Age:</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Pop</u>
60-64	54	11.56%
65-69	81	17.34%
70-74	94	20.13%
75-79	95	20.34%
80-84	67	14.35%
85 and over	70	14.99%
Not Reported	6	1.29%

<u>Race:</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Pop</u>
White	412	88.22%
Black	49	10.49%
Span-Am.	3	.65%
Other	3	.65%

<u>Living Arrangements:</u>		
<u>Lives with</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Pop</u>
Alone	214	30.18%
Spouse	202	28.49%
Child	16	2.26%
Sibling	65	9.17%
Son/Daug.-in-law	86	12.13%

<u>Degree of Mental Impairment:</u>	
	<u>Percent Pop</u>
Senility	30.41%
Emotional Disorder	16.06%
O.B.S./Mental Retardation	11.35%

<u>Degree of Physical Impairment:</u>	
	<u>Percent Pop</u>
Chronic Age-related condition	44.75%
Ambulatory Problems	22.48%
Sensory impairment	19.06%
Non-age-related chronic illness	17.56%
Bedridden	12.21%

Reaction of Abused to the situation

	<u>Percent Pop</u>
Denial	20.77%
Acceptance	30.41%
Fear	40.47%
Depression	32.33%
Mental Confusion	38.97%
Anger	22.70%
Sought Protection	20.56%

In as much as it was felt that knowledge of the characteristics of the abuser is just as important as knowledge of the characteristics of the abused when attempting to understand the dynamics of the abuse situation, those respondents who reported abuse were asked to supply information descriptive of the abuser. We were confident that the respondents would be able to provide the descriptive information because of the survey data which showed that 71.73% of those respondents reporting abuse had met personally with the abuser. The data accumulated is shown on Table 8.

Table 8
Characteristics of the Abusers

<u>Number of Abusers involved in this case:</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
One Abuser	340	72.81%
More than one abuser	127	27.19%

<u>Sex of Abuser:</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Male	51.56%
Female	43.16%
Unknown	5.28%

<u>Race of Abuser:</u>	<u>Percent</u>
White	87.89%
Black	10.15%
Other	1.95%

<u>Age of Abuser:</u>	<u>Percent</u>
10-15	.82%
16-20	2.45%
21-24	3.59%
25-30	5.55%
31-40	20.39%
41-50	19.90%
51-60	18.27%
61-70	12.56%
71-80	8.32%
81+	2.45%

Relationship of Abuser to abused:

<u>Sex of Abuser</u>	<u>Relationship to Abused</u>	<u>% Female Abusers</u>	<u>% Male Abusers</u>
M	Son	----	41.94%
M	Husband	----	22.87%
M	Other	----	35.19%
F	Daughter	39.92%	----
F	Daughter-in-law	22.87%	----
F	Wife	7.98%	----
F	Other	29.23%	----

What Stresses Were Present for the Abuser: Percent

Alcohol/drug abuse	24.41%
Mental illness	11.99%
Chronic physical disorder	10.92%
Major financial problems	19.70%
Stress of Caring for the abused	14.78%

*Percentages on these tables may exceed 100% due to the inclusion of multiple abusers.

The final bit of information solicited from the respondents dealt with the question: How does your agency currently deal with reported cases of elder abuse? The responses to that question are displayed on Table 9.

Table 9
Current Agency Response to Reported Abuse

<u>Response</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1. Refer to other agency	458	40.25%
2. Investigate, monitor or assess problem	102	8.96%
3. Legal Actions-Prot From Abuse Act-Police	128	11.25%
4. Provide Protective Services	231	20.30%
5. Provide information to abused and/or abuser	120	10.54%
6. Remove abused from situation-placement	83	7.29%
7. Other	76	6.68%
8. Agency does not deal with elderly abuse	284	24.96%
9. No response	167	14.67%

Discussion of the findings:

We began this survey in July 1980 with the mailing of more than 2,100 questionnaires to professionals and non-professionals who, in some capacity, serve older Pennsylvanians. The survey phase of the research ended in June 1981 with receipt of 1,138 completed survey instruments. The 1,138 respondents represented fourteen (14) different occupational categories. All fourteen (14) categories reported knowledge of at least one case of elder abuse occurring within the past twelve (12) months.

Each respondent was asked to describe, in detail, the most recent case of abuse. In addition, each respondent was asked to tell the total number of abuses that he/she learned of in the past year. The respondents cited 467 cases of abuse. The mean number of cases that respondents were aware of was five (5). From this information we can see that 41% of the respondents were aware of at least one (1) case of abuse. If we attribute the mean number of cases to all positive respondents the cited abuses could rise to 2,335. Consideration of the fact that elder abuse is grossly underreported causes us to wonder just how many cases of elder abuse did occur during the survey's 12 month period.

While no occupation was without knowledge of elder abuse, some occupations had markedly obvious higher rates of awareness. Protective service workers, homemakers, home health aides and social workers accounted for the highest rates of abuse citations.

An interesting point to be made here is that under current Pennsylvania law perhaps the most legally appropriate remedies for elder abuse are the filing of criminal charges or utilization of the protection from abuse (domestic violence) act. However, the data presented shows clearly that these remedies are not being widely utilized. Of the 467 cases of elder abuse cited by survey respondents only forty-three (43) were taken from police or domestic violence workers.

Of the 467 abuses described by respondents 44 percent involved physical abuse. This was followed by psychological abuse (38%), material abuse (13%) and violation of rights (4%). More than half of the victims had been abused at least twice previously.

In 90% of the cited abuses the victim required either medical treatment or protective services.

Subsequent to describing the abuse situation, the respondents provided descriptive information concerning the characteristics of the abused and the abuser.

With regard to the abused; the majority (76%) was female; 40% were aged 70-79 years old; 88% were white; more than half (58%) were widowed; 85% displayed a physical disability; while 71% were mentally disabled; 69% of the abused lived with their abuser and 75% of the time abuser and abused were related.

The following descriptive data was submitted with regard to the abusers. Most of the abusers (52%) were male. Of the male abusers 42

percent were sons of the victim and 23 percent were husbands. In those cases where the abuser was female (43%) the most frequent abusers were daughters of the victim (40%) followed by daughters-in-law (12%) and wives (8%). More than half (58%) of the abusers were married at the time they committed the abuse. In 67% of the citings the respondents reported that the abuser was experiencing some form of stress, most common were drug/alcohol abuse, medical problems, and financial problems. In addition, the respondents noted that in 61% of the citings the abused person was credited with being a source of stress to the abuser.

The final bit of data is related to the nature of the agency response to reported elder abuse. According to the survey, these responses are diverse, the most common responses included referral to another agency, provision of protective services, instigation of legal action on behalf of the abused, and removal of the abused from the residence.

Conclusions:

Those who are considered to be well-versed on the subject of family violence have said that the 1960's gave us child abuse; the 70's added spouse abuse; and the 1980's are a time of increasing concern about the existence of elder abuse.

In the earliest days of this project, during the times when questionnaires were being developed and survey populations were being determined, practitioners in the aging network were displaying an obvious concern about what they perceived as a significant problem, the increasing incidence of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and exploitation of the elderly by their caretakers. At every opportunity those involved in service to the elderly called for help in fighting this distasteful and emerging social problem. The pleas for help coupled with moving accounts of helpless elders being subjected to torturous conditions as social service providers stood by helplessly seized the attention of virtually every person with an interest in the well-being of the senior members of our society.

It became obvious quite soon that even though each service provider was well versed on the details of the case(s) of elder abuse that he/she had encountered personally, there was no unified source of data which could provide a more encompassing sense of the nature of the elder abuse problem in Pennsylvania. It became equally obvious that the absence of such information would prolong the heretofore futile attempts to address the problem in a comprehensive fashion. It was the desire to prevent further prolongation of these attempts which motivated the Department of Aging to collect the abuse-related information from individual sources and compile it as a first step in the process of comprehensively defining the problem of elder abuse in Pennsylvania.

Now that the survey is completed it will be possible for all concerned individuals to view, for the first time, a body of descriptive data concerning 467 cases of elder abuse which occurred within the Commonwealth. It is now possible to see that even though the occurrences of abuse may be geographically far removed from one another there are certain important similarities in the characteristics of the abused, the abuser, and the abuse situation.

No longer will the practitioner or administrator seeking support for actions to combat elder abuse be forced to say, "I can tell you about the case I had, but I don't know if the characteristics of my case are the rule or the exception to it."

The most important single conclusion drawn from this survey is that, according to the respondents, elder abuse is occurring at a significant rate within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

From this conclusion it is quite simple to draw another; those agencies and individuals charged with protecting the quality of life of older Pennsylvanians must take steps to reduce the impact of that abuse.

Recommendations:

The first, and perhaps most significant, point to be made is that no individual or agency should consider this project to be more than it can be. As said before, this data is descriptive of 467 specific cases of abuse. While the results do suggest various interesting concepts of importance with regard to prediction of "at risk" elders as well as potential strategies for abuse prevention programs, only after being tested by additional scientifically-controlled research can they be declared valid. With this in mind, the most obvious recommendation is for continued research.

With regard to further recommendations, it appears that a system comprised of specifically oriented components offers the best hope of adequately addressing the problems created or magnified by the occurrence of elder abuse. The system should allow for the inclusion of the following components:

1. Specialized Protective Service Workers

Where possible, workers should be designated to specialize in providing protective services to the elderly. These workers should be well trained in the areas of legal issues and procedures, counseling techniques for the elderly, etc. These workers should have a legal mandate to deliver services and should have limited immunity from civil and criminal liabilities.

2. Utilization of the Least Restrictive Alternative

In all cases every effort should be made to utilize the course of action which is least disruptive to the victim of the abuse.

3. Utilization of family support systems

Certain services should be made available to families who do provide care for a dependent elderly person. These services may include respite care, counseling and other supportive services.

4. Increased Visability of Protective Services

It is believed that as more individuals and agencies become aware of the availability of protective services (including family support services) more of the previously unreported abuse victims (and abusers) will move into the system and receive services.

5. Development and utilization of prevention programs

The ultimate goal of any abuse-related undertaking must be the creation of a state wherein no elderly person is abused, neglected, exploited or abandoned. To approach this goal the underlying causes of abuse must be vigorously attacked. For primary prevention to be effective research efforts must deliver considerable new knowledge.

6. The existence of alternative residences

In those cases where it is necessary to remove the abused elder from the present living arrangement it is essential that a wide range of acceptable residential alternatives be available as a resource.

In as much as many of the components detailed above are currently in place in the aging network, the completion of a total system is by no means unrealistic. It is logical to conclude that a system combining protective services (based on the principles of the least disruptive alternatives) with family support and increased attention to primary prevention strategies will have significant impact on the problems created by the occurrence of elder abuse in Pennsylvania.

END