

Conceptual Definitions and Operational Frameworks for Five Types of Perpetrated Elder Mistreatment

Conceptual definition of Elder Physical Abuse:

Physical elder abuse is the intentional action of a person who stands in a position of trust to a vulnerable older adult (age 65 or greater) that may result in bodily injury or physical pain of the older adult.

Operational Definition of Elder Physical Abuse

I. Assumptions

- **May include sexual abuse.**
- **Does not consider the perpetrator's intent to do harm (does consider the perpetrator's intent to act).**
- **Does include improper physical restraint.**
- **Does include chemical restraint.**
- **Does not include threats with a weapon, but does include use of a weapon that may result in bodily injury, physical pain or impairment (such as firing a gun at the elder, whether or not the elder is physically injured as a result).**
- **Does not require evidence of harm. Evidence of risk of harm is sufficient.**
- **The vulnerability of the older adult may be due to a physical or psychological disability or dementia, or due to circumstances such as bereavement or isolation.**
- **The degree or level of vulnerability of the older adult influences the assessment of the presence or severity of physical abuse. (Abusive actions that may have minor severity or not be considered abusive to some older adults, may constitute severe abuse in a vulnerable older adult.)**

Operational Definition of Elder Physical Abuse (cont.)

II. Actions

- **Having been hit, slapped, or kicked**
- **Having been tied down**
- **Having been beaten to cause internal injury**
- **Having been stabbed**
- **Infliction of pain, hair-pulling, arm-twisting**
- **Shook**
- **Used a knife or gun on**
- **Choked**
- **Slammed against a wall**
- **Beat up**
- **Burned or scalded on purpose**
- **Punched or hit with something that could hurt**
- **Threw something that could hurt**
- **Hit with something like a belt, hairbrush, stick or some other hard object**
- **Pinched or scratched**
- **Knocked down**
- **Bit**

III. Injuries

- **Sprain, bruise or small cut because of a fight or struggle**
- **Passed out from being hit on the head in a fight**
- **Went to the doctor because of a fight or struggle**
- **Needed to see a doctor because of a fight or struggle**
- **Had a broken bone because of a fight or struggle**
- **Felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight or struggle**
- **Felt weak, groggy or sleepy because I was given more medicine than I was supposed to have or was given illegal drugs *by someone caring for me.***
- **Had rope burns or other wounds from being tied up**

Conceptual definition of Elder Psychological Abuse:

Elder psychological abuse is the verbal or non-verbal act or acts of a person who stands in a position of trust to a vulnerable older adult (age 65 or greater) that result in mental pain, anguish, or distress in the older adult.

Operational Definition of Elder Psychological Abuse

I. Assumptions

- **Does not consider the perpetrator's intent to do harm (does consider the perpetrator's intent to act)**
- **Does not require evidence of harm. Evidence of risk of harm is sufficient.**
- **The vulnerability of the older adult may be due to a physical or psychological disability or dementia, or due to circumstances such as bereavement or isolation.**
- **The degree or level of vulnerability of the older adult influences the assessment of the presence or severity of psychological abuse.**
- **Psychological abuse is often chronic in nature. The number of times that constitutes psychological abuse depends on the severity of the abusive action.**
- **Social isolation (as opposed to physical restraint, though they may co-occur) is itself a form of psychological abuse, unless it is performed in response to a reasonably perceived threat of danger to property or physical safety**
- **Includes deceptive verbal or non-verbal acts such as lying to the older adult or hiding the older adult's belongings to induce anxiety, etc.**
- **Includes statements that humiliate or infantilize the older adult.**
- **Includes coercing the older adult into doing something that causes emotional pain or injury.**
- **Psychological abuse frequently co-occurs with other types of abuse by others. In addition, other types of abuse frequently cause mental suffering. The operationalization of psychological abuse for this project refers to verbal or non-verbal actions other than those that constitute physical or sexual abuse, financial exploitation and neglect by others that cause mental suffering.**

Operational Definition of Elder Psychological Abuse (cont.)

II. Actions

- **Threatened me with punishment, deprivation, or institutionalization**
- **Called me names.**
- **Stalked or followed me around**
- **Threatened with physical injury**
- **Threatened with sexual advances**
- **Threatened with a knife or other harmful tool**
- **Social isolation from friends, family, or significant others**
- **Threatened they are lucky to have them, threaten to leave**
- **Told mental capacity is poor and needs a guardian**
- **Actions are controlled by another, (not allowed to make own decisions)**
- **Made to feel worthless**
- **Threatened to not allow visits with family or friends**
- **Threatened with guardianship or conservatorship**
- **Threatened with abandonment**
- **Threatened to harm family or friends**
- **Threatened to hit or throw something at**
- **Did something to spite**
- **Destroyed something belonging to**
- **Shouted or yelled at**
- **Stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement**
- **Insulted or swore at**
- **Called fat or ugly**
- **Withheld affection**
- **Told one is old and should die**

Conceptual definition of Elder Financial Abuse:

Financial elder abuse or exploitation is the improper taking, misuse, or concealment of a vulnerable older adult's (aged 65 or greater) resources, property or assets. The abuser is a person who stands in a position of trust with the older adult, acting for his or her own profit or benefit of a third party, by means of coercion, enticement, intimidation, deception or other forms of undue influence.

Operational Definition of Elder Financial Abuse

I. Assumptions

- **Does not consider the perpetrator's intent to do harm (does consider the perpetrator's intent to act).**
- **Does not require evidence of harm. Evidence of risk of harm is sufficient.**
- **The vulnerability of the older adult may be due to a physical or psychological disability or dementia, or due to circumstances such as bereavement or isolation.**
- **The degree or level of vulnerability of the older adult influences the assessment of the presence or severity of financial abuse.**

The following eight assumptions make up the operational framework for abuse documented in (Kemp & Mosqueda, 2005).

- **An older adult who possesses assets is vulnerable to financial abuse and undue influence from others because of any of a variety of medical, pharmacological, psychological, or social problems.**
- **Another person, one who the older person typically trusts, takes advantage of that vulnerability through any of a variety of deceptive actions. These actions constitute the undue influence or the exploitation. The perpetrator may have a long-term relationship with the older person, or it may be a new relationship. The trust may have been established through a personal relationship, by a supposed professional position, or because the older person lacked alternatives. The undue influence may be manifested by deceit, creating dependency, intimidation, becoming overly involved in the older person's life or in other ways that take advantage of any vulnerability.**
- **Assets, either currently negotiable (e.g., cash) or of future value (e.g., trusts) are transferred from the older person to the perpetrator. The transfers are made during the period of vulnerability.**
- **The older person or the transactions are kept isolated, controlled, or secret.**

Operational Definition of Elder Financial Abuse(cont.)

- A qualified expert did not conduct an appropriate assessment of the older person's capacities and vulnerabilities before the transfer of assets to determine whether it was in the best interest of the older person and whether the older person was acting with sufficient mental capacity, self-determination, and in the absence of undue influence.
- If assets are transferred, the benefits to the older person are not proportional to the value of the assets transferred to the perpetrator, or the transfer is not consistent with the older person's prior beliefs, wishes, or behavior.
- Common business or personal ethics are not followed. No agreements are made in writing, there is not full disclosure of the nature of the transaction, there is no right to change one's mind, there is no verification that the older person fully understood the arrangement, or there are conflicts of interest.
- The alleged perpetrator does not give consideration to the effect of the transaction on others, including the victim, other family members, beneficiaries, or the public welfare system.

II. Actions

- Made home repairs at high prices and did not complete the work
- Made automobile repairs at high prices and did not complete the work
- Took out a loan with high interest rates and/or hidden fees
- Paid for fake life/health insurance policy
- Paid for fake funeral expenses
- Purchased travel packages promoted as low cost that were very costly
- Gave money to a telemarketer and received nothing in return
- Gave money requested by mail/e-mail and received nothing in return
- Let a person cash a social security or pension check and received none of the
 - Money
- Let a person sell personal items and received none of the money
- Gave another person access to bank account against the elder's will
- Transferred the title of property to another person *MODIFICATION: Add "if done through undue influence"*
- Another person has used a credit/debit card without permission
- Another person used force to make them power of attorney
- Took money without permission
- Forced to make purchases against older person's will
- Changed will against wishes
- Uses older person's home to sell illegal drugs
- Denial of the right of access to, or control over, personal funds.

Operational Definition of Elder Financial Abuse(cont.)

- **Cashing checks without authorization or permission**
- **Forging an older person's signature**
- **Misusing or stealing an older person's possessions**
- **Coercing or deceiving an older person into signing a document (e.g., contracts or a will)**
- **Improper use of conservatorship, guardianship, or power of attorney for financial gain**
- **Misuse of a joint checking accounts**
- **Theft of social security or pension checks**

Conceptual definition of Elder Sexual Abuse:

Elder sexual abuse is non-consensual sexual contact or exposure with a vulnerable older adult (age 65 or greater) by a person who stands in a position of trust. It includes sexual contact with an older adult incapable of giving informed consent.

Operational Definition of Elder Sexual Abuse

I. Assumptions

- **Does not consider the perpetrator's intent to do harm (does consider the perpetrator's intent to act).**
- **Does not require evidence of harm. Evidence of risk of harm is sufficient.**
- **The vulnerability of the older adult may be due to a physical or psychological disability or dementia, or due to circumstances such as bereavement or isolation.**
- **The degree or level of vulnerability of the older adult influences the assessment of the presence of sexual abuse.**
- **The sexual contact may be forced, tricked, coerced, or manipulated.**
- **If the older adult, an alleged victim of sexual abuse, lacks capacity to consent to a sexual relationship, the assessment of whether sexual abuse occurred may depend on the nature of the relationship with the alleged perpetrator that existed prior to the onset of dementia.**

Operational Definition of Elder Sexual Abuse (cont.)

II. Actions

- **Used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make me have oral or anal sex.**
- **Used force to make me have sex.**
- **Insisted that I have sex when I didn't want to (but did not use physical force).**
- **Used threats to make me have oral or anal sex.**
- **Insisted I have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).**
- **Used threats to make me have sex. (CTS2 Sexual Coercion Scale)**
- **Having been touched in a sexual way without permission**
- **Having been forced to touch another adult in a sexual way**
- **Forced to participate in pornographic/sexually explicit filming**
- **Forced to view pornographic/sexually explicit material**
- **Forced to view sexual activity**
- **Exposure to sexual organs**
- **Rubbing sexual organs against the person**
- **Been forced to have sex by another person?**
- **Perpetrator masturbated self**
- **Sexual talk**
- **Penetration by a foreign object**
- **Coerced nudity**

III. Injuries

- **Incurred injuries (bruising, inflammation, tenderness, abrasions, or trauma) to the area around the genital organs**
- **Contracted a sexually transmitted disease**

Conceptual definition of Elder Neglect by others:

Neglect (by others) is the failure to exercise that degree of care that a reasonable person in a like position would exercise by anyone having care or custody of a vulnerable older adult (age 65 or greater). Neglect may include (but is not limited to):

- **failure to assist in personal hygiene, or in the provision of food, water, clothing, shelter, medicine, personal safety and other essentials;**
- **failure to provide services necessary to maintain physical and mental health;**
- **failure to protect from abuse or exploitation;**
- **a lack of attention to the older person’s physical surroundings, resulting in unhealthy and unsafe conditions.**

Operational Definition of Elder Neglect by others

I. Assumptions

- **Neglect also includes abandonment (Abandonment is the desertion or willful forsaking of an older adult under circumstances in which a reasonable person would continue to provide care and custody).**
- **Neglect may be intentional, as when a caregiver deliberately fails to fulfill caretaking responsibilities in order to harm or punish the elderly person (for example, willfully withholding food or medication), or it may be unintentional, stemming either from ignorance or from a genuine inability to provide care.**
- **A caregiver may be a family member, a friend or an employee of the elder or of a nursing or other type of facility or an employee of any agency responsible for providing care.**
- **The responsibility for the care of an older adult shifts from self to another person when the older adult lacks capacity for self-care and another person or persons responsible for providing care can be identified.**
- **Social isolation (as opposed to physical restraint, though they may co-occur) is itself a form of psychological abuse, unless it is performed in response to a reasonably perceived threat of danger to property or physical safety.¹ (Social isolation is not categorized as neglect for purposes of this study.)**
- **Although restraints (physical or chemical) may be perceived as rendering persons “easier” to care for, they are categorized as a form of physical abuse, not neglect, for the purposes of this study.**

¹ This statement achieved consensus as an assumption about psychological elder abuse.

Operational Definition of Elder Neglect by others (cont.)

- **Misuse of medication, other than for the purposes of restraint, for example, giving a patient too much or too little of an indicated drug, withholding a necessary medication altogether, or administering unnecessary or inappropriate medication, may constitute neglect or physical abuse. Factors that affect which type of mistreatment occurred (physical abuse or neglect) include intention of the caregiver, whether the medication was withheld or administered, whether administration was forcible and the potential severity of the outcome.**
- **Some types of apparent neglect, such as poor personal care can be a matter of lifestyle or choice. Thus, a neglect finding requires investigation of previous habits and any recent decline as well as screening for cognitive impairment or mental illness.**

II.Omissions

The following assumption applies when considering each omission below: there is an identifiable caregiver, who controls the means of addressing the omission.

- **Lacks eyeglasses that are needed**
- **Lacks hearing aids that are needed**
- **Lacks false teeth that are needed**
- **Left alone for long periods of time that are unsafe**
- **Home is unsafe/hazardous**
- **Lacks assistance for care when needed**
- **Lacks adequate personal care**
- **Not treated for physical health problems**
- **Lacks adequate shelter**
- **Lacks adequate clothing**
- **Lacks adequate nutrition / fails to provide meals**
- **Lacks adequate hydration**
- **Lacks adequate medical care**
- **Lacks adequate medications**
- **Contractures are present due to inadequate care**
- **Deep pressure sores are present due to inadequate care**
- **Having untreated deep pressure sores or open wounds on your body**
- **Lack of utilities in the home**
- **Home infested with animals/insects**
- **Loss of weight with no physical illness**
- **Lacks adequate personal hygiene**
- **Teeth are decayed**
- **Home is unsanitary**
- **Lacks appropriate medical equipment**

Operational Definition of Elder Neglect by others (cont.)

- **Presence of urine/feces or odor of such**
- **Untreated injuries**
- **Caregiver refuses to consider higher level of care or in-home services**
- **Fails to assist with dressing and toileting.**
- **No food is available, or the only food in the house is spoiled.**
- **The caregiver left the older adult home alone even when you thought someone should be with him or her.**
- **The caregiver was not able to make sure the older adult in your care got the food he or she needed.**
- **The caregiver was not able to make sure the older adult in your care got to a doctor or hospital when he or she needed it.**
- **The caregiver was so drunk or high that you had a problem taking care of the older adult**

III. Injuries

- **Became ill because someone caring for me would not give me (enough of) the medications that that were prescribed for me**
- **Developed multiple bedsores while being cared for by another adult**
- **Did not get enough to drink and became dehydrated while being cared for by another adult.**
- **Did not get enough to eat and lost a lot of weight while being cared for by another adult.**
- **Felt very sad for more than two weeks because of the bad care I was receiving**
- **Fell as the result of a cluttered, unsafe home environment**