

**Estimating Elder Abuse
Through Community Sentinels:
Results of the National Elder Abuse
Incidence Study**

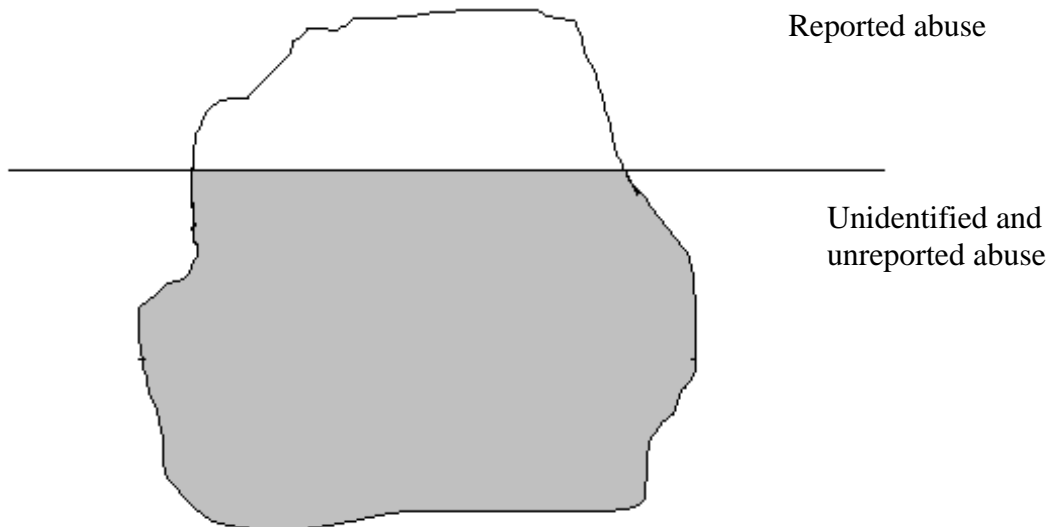
Conducted by
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Objectives of National Elder Abuse Incidence Study (NEAIS)

- Mandated by Congress and funded by HHS Administration for Aging and Administration on Children and Families
- Measure current incidents of elder abuse and neglect in domestic settings
 - Incidence—new cases occurring in 1996 (rather than prevalence, or the total number of cases at a designated time)
 - Excludes nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, or other institutional settings; also excludes con schemes
 - Elderly aged 60 and older
- Estimate both reported and unreported abuse and neglect (elder maltreatment)
 - Also estimated incidence of self-neglect among elderly
 - Charting abuse and neglect previously neither identified nor reported
 - Metaphor of abuse and neglect as iceberg



Iceberg theory of elder abuse

Study Design and Methodology

- Sentinel methodology used routinely for national samples, including Current Population Survey and Health Interview Survey
- Westat developed and conducted nation's first sentinel incidence study of child abuse 20 years ago
- Has been used for all three national child abuse incidence studies funded by HHS—most recent one completed in 1997.
- Alternative to more costly studies of general population surveys.
- Nationally representative (stratified, multistage) sample of 20 counties in 15 states; stratified by five variables:
 - geographic region
 - metropolitan vs. non-metropolitan area
 - mandatory vs. non-mandatory reporting
 - percentage of elderly
 - percentage of poor elderly
- Counties selected with probability proportional to number of elders living there
- Using probability proportional to size method ensures approximately self-weighting sample (i.e., every elder in the country had approximately same chance of being identified, regardless of location, when measure of size is number of elders in county)
- Data collected from two reporting sources:
 1. local Adult Protective Services (APS) agencies –responsible for receiving and investigating reports
 2. community sentinels—specially trained individuals in variety of community agencies having frequent contact with elderly
 - law enforcement—sheriff and police
 - hospitals and public health departments
 - banks
 - elder care providers—including senior centers, adult day care centers, home health agencies

Total of 248 sentinel agencies and 1,100 sentinel reporters randomly selected

Study Design and Methodology Continued...

- Seven standardized definitions and signs/symptoms developed through consensus process:
 - *physical abuse*—physical force resulting in bodily injury, pain, or impairment
 - *sexual abuse*—non-consensual sexual contact of any kind
 - *emotional or psychological abuse*—anguish, emotional pain, or distress
 - *neglect*—failure to provide necessities, personal safety, or necessary care
 - *abandonment*—desertion
 - *financial or material exploitation*—improper use of funds or assets
 - *self-neglect*—behaviors threatening own health or safety; excludes voluntary acts of competent people
- Data collection instrument development and pre-testing
- Training for both APS and sentinel reporters, and site visits by project staff
- Data collected during two-month period in each county in 1996--staggered reporting periods to account for seasonal variation
- Methodology for producing national estimates
 - Unduplication—elder abuse data duplication a big problem historically
 - participant tracking
 - non-response adjustment
 - weighting
 - annualization—full 1996 data by multiplying two months data by six
 - replicate weights

Study Findings

National Estimates of Abuse and Neglect

- Estimate of incidence is the total of reports submitted to and substantiated by APS agencies and reports made by sentinels and presumed to be substantiated.
- Approximately 450,000 elders (aged 60 and over) were abused and neglected in 1996
 - Only 16% (or about 71,000) reported to and substantiated by APS
 - 84% (or about 379,000) reported by sentinels—previously unreported
 - Over five times as many incidents not reported
- When elder persons only experiencing self-neglect are added, total increases to 551,000, with almost four times as many reported by sentinels than substantiated by APS

Types of Abuse and Neglect—Reported to APS

236,322	reports to APS
115,110	substantiated (49%)
92,796	not substantiated (39%)
28,416	still under investigation or other outcomes (12%)

- Of 115,110 substantiated reports, 44,168 elders experienced only **self-neglect** (38%)
- The remaining 70,942 elders (or 62%) were maltreated by other people (called perpetrators), and they experienced over 103,000 different types of abuse or neglect (an average of 1.45 types per elderly person)

<u>Type of Abuse</u>	<u>Number of Reports</u>	<u>Percent of Reports by Types of Abuse</u>	<u>Percent of Abused Elders Experiencing Each Type of Abuse</u>
Neglect	34,525	34%	49%
Emotional	25,142	24	35
Financial	21,427	21	30
Physical	18,144	18	26
Abandonment	2,560	2	4
Sexual and Other	1,213	1	2
Total	103,011	100%	*

*Totals to more than 100% because more than one substantiated type of abuse was often reported for an incident.

Who is Abused and Neglected?

- Victims reported to APS resemble characteristics of victims identified by sentinel agencies for many categories of abuse and neglect. A few differences are also noted.
- Women are disproportionately victims. While 58% of all elders aged 60 and over are women:
 - between 60% and 76% of abused elders are women in all categories except abandonment substantiated by APS. Greatest disparity between men and women is substantiated emotional abuse.
 - sentinels reported women as victims between 67% and 92% of incidents, with financial abuse the greatest disparity with men.
- Oldest elders (age 80 and over) are abused and neglected at rates two to three times their proportion of elderly population (19%)
 - Accounted for 52% of neglect victims in APS reports and 60% in sentinel reports.
 - APS found oldest elders very disproportionately subjected to financial abuse (48%), physical abuse (44%), and emotional abuse (41%)
- APS and sentinel data differ somewhat regarding race of victims.
 - APS found that African-American elders (representing 8% of all elderly) were victims in 17% of incidents of neglect, 15% of financial exploitation, and 14% of emotional abuse
 - APS reported only small proportions (3% or less) of Hispanics and other non-African-American minorities in most categories of abuse.
 - Sentinel data found fewer than 8% of victims were minorities, including African-Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities. Minorities were 12% of self-neglecting elders
- Elders with physical and mental frailty were more likely to suffer abuse and neglect.
 - Three-quarters of elders in APS substantiated incidents and half of sentinel reported elders were unable or somewhat **unable to take care of themselves**. (Benchmark—estimated 14% of elderly as a whole have difficulties with one or more activities of daily living.)
 - Sixty percent of APS substantiated elders and 45% of sentinel reported elders had some degree of **confusion**. (Benchmark—estimated 10% of elder population suffers from some form of dementia.)

- Nearly half of abused elderly (44% of APS and 47% of sentinel) exhibited **depression**. (Benchmark—estimated 15% of elders nationally are depressed at any one time.)

Self-neglect among the Elderly

- Self-neglect is a serious problem, with about 139,000 new APS substantiated and sentinel reports in 1996.
 - Women and oldest elderly are most likely to self-neglect.
 - Two-thirds are women (compared to 58% of total elderly population)
 - Forty-five percent were 80 years and older (compared to 19% of all elders); another 20% were age 75-79
- Many self-neglecting elders are unable or only somewhat able to care for themselves (93%) and/or are confused (75%). Only 18% appeared depressed—much less than victims of abuse and neglect (44%).

Who Reports Abuse?

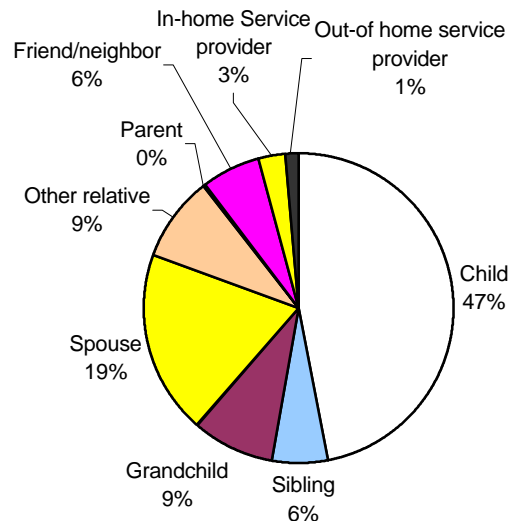
- Wide variety of persons reported domestic elder abuse and neglect substantiated by APS.
 - Family members are most frequent reporters (20%).
 - Other categories include hospital personnel (17%), police and sheriffs (11%), in-home service providers (10%), friends and neighbors (9%), victims themselves (9%), and health care providers (8%).
- In cases of self-neglect, most frequent reporters to APS are hospitals (20%), friends and neighbors (19%), in-home service providers (12%), police and sheriffs (12%), health care providers (12%), out-of-home providers (8%), and family members (6%).

Who Perpetrates Abuse and Neglect?

- Women caused slightly higher proportion of neglect (52% vs. 48% for men), which is the most frequent type of maltreatment.
- For all other categories of abuse reported to APS, men outnumbered women as perpetrators by at least three to two. Among reports by sentinels, male perpetrators outnumbered females by almost two to one.

- About 90% of abusers are family members (both APS and sentinel reports)—not surprising since family members are frequently primary caregivers of elderly in domestic settings.
 - Adult children are most frequent abusers—47% of APS substantiated incidents.
 - Spouses were next most frequent (19%), followed by grandchildren (9%) and other relatives (9%), as depicted in figure below

Relationship of perpetrators to victims of domestic abuse



- Adult children are most common perpetrators for every type of abuse and neglect substantiated by APS, ranging from 43% for neglect to 80% for abandonment.
- Two-thirds of perpetrators of domestic elder abuse were under 60 years old, and one-quarter were 70 or older.
- Perpetrators of financial exploitation substantiated by APS were most youthful, with 45% aged 40 and under and another 40% between 41 and 59 years of age.

Study Limitations and Future Research Questions

Study Limitations

- Sentinel technique unable to identify all abused and neglected elders
 - No community institution or organization to which all elders relate (like schools for children)
 - Isolated elders (both rural and urban) with little or no community contact
 - Challenge of “transferring” research methods to new study populations
- Resource limitations of study that produced a smaller number of sentinel reports, resulting in relatively large standard errors and confidence bands used in calculating incidence estimates. Estimates would have been more precise with:
 - Larger sample size—more counties
 - More sentinels in each county
 - Longer data collection period for sentinels and APS agencies

Some Future Research Questions

- What is the relationship of caregiving responsibilities and:
 - abusive family members?
 - abusive spouses and parents, especially around neglect?
 - 80+ year old perpetrators?
- Are there characteristics of perpetrators, aged 60 and over, that aging service providers could affect by reaching out and providing services (e.g., respite care) that would reduce abuse committed?
- What are the economic condition of victims of abuse and neglect compared with elders overall?
- Why do sentinels recognize abuse among women at a much higher rate than is reflected among APS reports? Do we need to train people better to recognize abuse among men?

Implications—Call to Action

- Sensitize the community about the importance of recognizing and reporting elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect.
 - Health care workers
 - Public human service workers
- Be particularly watchful for:
 - Elders age 80 and over
 - Isolated elderly who may not have much community contact
 - Self-neglect among elders who are unable to care for themselves and are confused
- Develop comprehensive local services and protocols for investigating and intervening in incidents of elder abuse (e.g., APS multidisciplinary team)
- Study and replicate national/regional/state prevention and intervention promising practices
 - Western region's higher rate of reporting and substantiation
 - Texas' APS Elder Abuse Prevention Kit
- Mobilize communities and individual actions—contact and caring for elderly
 - Regular contact with elderly neighbors
 - Volunteer service—meals on wheels, home repair, shut-in visitation
 - Caregiver respite, perhaps through religious congregation

If You Suspect Abuse

If you suspect that elder abuse or neglect has occurred or is occurring to an older person whom you know, report your suspicion to the local Adult Protective Services (APS) agency. You can find the telephone number for the APS office by checking the blue government section of your phone book or by calling directory assistance and asking for the department of social services or agency on aging. It is essential to call the office with jurisdiction over the geographical area where the elder lives.

It is also important to note, that all but six or seven states have mandatory reporting requirements for a wide variety of persons, including social workers, physicians, nurses, police officers, and dentists/dental hygienists. For specific mandatory reporting requirements in your state, check with the local APS or agency on aging.

Resources

The Executive Summary of the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study (19 pages) is available on APHSA's web site (www.aphsa.org/hotnews/neaais.htm).

The full report (136 pages) is available on the U.S. Administration on Aging's web site at www.aoa.gov/abuse/report/default.htm.