

THE OBSERVER



Monthly Publication

Volume 3 | Publication 30

Reporting Accurate and Objective Information Based on Facts, not Agenda-Setting Theories

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Elder Abuse

Gray Homicides

Series - Part 1

There is an epidemic of [gray homicides](#) going undetected and unpunished.

"The medical forensic aspects of elder abuse and neglect are largely [unexplored and undocumented](#). Those who work in the field of elder abuse and neglect believe that the state of medical knowledge and forensic science regarding elder abuse and neglect is approximately equivalent to that of child abuse/neglect three decades ago and domestic violence 10 to 15 years ago."

According to a National Public Radio report titled [How is Death Investigated in your State](#) funding cuts have forced many states to eliminate autopsies of suicide and auto accident victims. Some states no longer require an autopsy on a person over sixty (60) years old, in fact, Oklahoma excludes autopsies for those over forty (40). What does this mean? Many homicides of the elderly go undetected and those who commit the crime are not penalized.

There is an [African proverb](#) that says "when an elder dies, a whole library has burned down to the ground".

The perception of violence varies from culture to culture and not every country has laws protecting their senior citizens. Although the western countries have laws and prosecute the perpetrators, only 1 in 5 elderly abuse cases are actually reported. In the sixties, child neglect and abuse became a media topic for discussion. The talk shows had a new platform of abuse data when in the seventies, spousal abuse reigned on the circuit. By the mid-seventies, G.R. Burston wrote of "[granny bashing](#)" and Robert Butler revealed "[battered old person syndrome](#)." Susan Steinmetz shared her information with the public regarding her "[discovery](#)" of battered elders and the denial coupled with surprise that it happens. By the eighties, the House Select Committee on Aging while investigating [held national public hearings](#).

What are the signs of Elderly Abuse?

The below fact sheet was produced by the National Center on Elder Abuse ([NCEA](#)). Portions were adapted from the [NCEA publication](#): "15 Questions & Answers About Elder Abuse"

Warning Signs:

Physical Abuse - Slap marks, unexplained bruises, most pressure marks, and certain types of burns or blisters, such as cigarette burns

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Neglect - Pressure ulcers, filth, lack of medical care, malnutrition or dehydration

Emotional Abuse - Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness, or other unusual behavioral changes

Sexual Abuse - Bruises around the breasts or genital area and unexplained sexually transmitted diseases

Financial Abuse/Exploitation - Sudden change in finances and accounts, altered wills and trusts, unusual bank withdrawals, checks written as "loans" or "gifts," and loss of property

What Can I Do to Prevent Elder Abuse?

- *Report suspected mistreatment* to your local adult protective services agency or law enforcement. Although a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, continue to speak out.
- *Keep in contact* – Talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It will also give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.
- *Be aware of the possibility of abuse* – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people, when they have not seemed so in the past?
- *Contact your local Area Agency on Aging* office to identify local programs and sources of support, such as *Meals on Wheels*. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse.
- *Volunteer* – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support for seniors.

But how does one cope with the parents who lacked parenting skills, love and compassion? Author [Eleanor Cade's book](#): "Taking Care of Parents Who Didn't Take Care of You - Making Peace with Aging Parents" offers solutions to unresolved problems with the dysfunctional family.

[News items](#) become more shocking as more abuse injustices against the elderly are revealed. On March 2, 2011, adored actor [Mickey Rooney](#) told a Senate Special Committee that he was abused by a family member.

Report elderly abuse...it's a crime!

If you need help, please contact the below sources.

1-800-96-ABUSE
(1-800-962-2873)

1-800-96-Elder
(1-800-963-5337)

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1-888-895-7873 (Statewide)

1-888-831-0404

To Report Abuse, Call:

1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

El abuso a los ancianos. El abandono. La explotación.

Le pasa a tus amigos, a tus vecinos y a tu familia.

Para reportar abuso,

llama al:

1-800-96-ABUSE

(1-800-962-2873)

Para aprender más,

llama al:

1-800-96-ELDER

(1-800-963-5337)

Suggested Reading:

[Florida Elder Abuse Survey](#)