

# THE OBSERVER



Monthly Publication

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

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## **Elder Abuse**

Where's The Data?

Series - Part 2 of 3

[\(Part 1\)](#) [\(Part 2\)](#)

*"We learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction." - Malcolm Gladwell*

The complexity of investigating elder abuse is complicated because the provenance of this crime can not be designated. At what point in a child's life did he or she feel so helpless and abused, that years later the pain would propel the child to victimize their abuser? The generational respect has dwindled significantly when a grown child, relatives or caregivers abuse the elderly which affects the victims' health and lifespan.

According to a March 21, 2011 Government Accountability Office [Report](#) comprising the most recent and extensive elder abuse research, a large number of cases go unreported because not all states require mandatory reporting and those that do, only have certain professionals responding. Depression is a key factor for seniors who avoid abuse reporting. Within the past year, 14.1% of aged adults who are not institutionalized have been physically, psychologically, sexually, financially exploited and/or neglected. Having a strong social network involving friends and family is a form of protection from potential perpetrators (caregivers, relatives, grandchildren and spouses.) A 2010 study of the perpetrators revealed they were often substance abusers. However, the GAO report and three other major studies are flawed because not all abuse classifications were included.

The abuse of the elderly with mental impairment was not tracked and the tracking studies were inconsistent. Often the financial and neglect abuses were not included in the studies. Where's the data? **The elder abuse collected data is lacking and needs to be all encompassing of abuses.**

Because there is no nationwide data system that collects and maintains information in a uniform way pertaining to elderly abuse, the reporting of the abuses are reliant upon individual state procedures for the allocation of training, staffing, preventative funding and public awareness campaigns. Funding is insufficient. **The importance of a national administrative data system for Adult Protective Services (APS) is imperative!** Florida's Child Protective Services shares their database with APS, thus all pertinent information regarding the elderly is not registered and monitored effectively.

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Based on present studies, the most competent way of curtailing elder abuse is using the *"multidisciplinary collaboration"* involving APS, Law Enforcement, the criminal justice system, financial institutions, social support and public awareness. By discussing and reporting elder abuse, society will become more aware of the tragic injustices inflicted on the senior population who still have value and are not invisible. There is a consensus that if the collaboration of the various systems are not unified, the perpetrators will not be prosecuted. We need insightful, powerful, ethical and persuasive federal politicians to turn this deplorable abuse around and protect our treasured golden-agers.

Controversial Florida [Senator Claude Pepper](#) was a strong advocate for the Social Security System often referred to as a retirement plan although its similarities were more conducive to 'a pyramid scheme'. He was adamant about retirees receiving payments from the system and acknowledged early on that eventually there would be too few contributors and too many withdrawals to maintain this program.

Florida is [one of four States](#) with the highest percentage of people over the age of 85 years.

According to the U.S. [Senate Special Committee on Aging](#) hearing held March 2, 2011, Mark Lachs, MD, MPH, Professor of Medicine and Co-Chief of the Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology at Weill Medical College, unveiled a statewide study of elder abuse in New York recently completed by a [collaborative team](#) from Cornell University, the New York City Department for the Aging, and Lifespan of Greater Rochester. *"Based on our research it would appear that for every elder abuse victim that makes it into an official service or reporting system, another 23 to 24 go undetected,"* Lachs said. It's important to support research for protection of the elderly.

Senator Herbert Kohl of Wisconsin reintroduced the [Elder Abuse Victims Act of 2011](#) in March and it was endorsed by the Elder Justice Coalition.

A [Senate bill](#) to better protect, serve, and advance the rights of victims of elder abuse and exploitation by establishing a program to encourage States and other qualified entities to create jobs designed to hold offenders accountable, enhance the capacity of the justice system to investigate, pursue, and prosecute elder abuse cases, identify existing resources to leverage to the extent possible, and assure data collection, research, and evaluation to promote the efficacy and efficiency of the activities described in this Act.

The Department of Justice now has an [Office of Elder Justice](#). Domestic abuse during senior years is also addressed in [The Violence Against Women Act](#) which will include Senator Kohl's *"End Abuse in Later Life Act of 2011."*

[Abraham Lincoln once said:](#) *"And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."*

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**Suggested Additional Reading:**

[Florida Elder Abuse Survey](#)

[The National Center for Victims of Crime](#)