

# ELDER ABUSE FACT SHEET



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## What is it?

Elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or “trusted” individual that lead to, or may lead to, harm of a vulnerable elder.

## Key Facts:

- **How Many Elders Are Abused?** According to the Department of Justice, a minimum of 1 in 9 or 11% percent of Americans over age 60 have experienced some form of elder abuse in the past year.
- **Many Cases Go Unreported.** For every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect reported to authorities, at least five more go unreported.
- **Who Commits Elder Abuse?** In almost 90% of the elder abuse and neglect incidents with a known perpetrator, the perpetrator is a family member, and two-thirds of the perpetrators are adult children or spouses.
- **Financial Abuse is Common.** Elder financial abuse is regarded as the third most commonly substantiated type of elder abuse, following neglect and emotional/psychological abuse. While underreported, the annual financial loss by victims of elder financial abuse is estimated to be at least \$2.6 billion dollars.
- **Reports Increasing.** As the number of elders increases, so does the problem. Adult Protective Services (APS) found that elder abuse reports have increased by 16% comparing data from 2000 with that of 2004.
- **Death Rates Higher.** For those elders who have been mistreated, the risk of death is 300 times greater than those who have not been.

## Who is at risk?

- **Women and Very Elderly Most at Risk.** Elder abuse affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races. However, women and “older” elders are more likely to be victimized. In 2003, two out of every three (65.7%) elder abuse victims were women and in 20 of the states, more than two in five victims (42.8%) were age 80 or older.

## Types of Abuse:

Physical

Financial or material exploitation

Neglect

Sexual

Abandonment

Emotional/psychological

## Federal Protections for Older Americans:

Older Americans have a basic right to live out their lives with dignity and respect, free from the fear of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Our country made a national commitment to protect children and women from abuse by enacting the Child Abuse Prevention Act in 1974 and the Violence Against Women Act in 1994. On March 23rd, 2010, decades after the first Congressional hearing on elder abuse, older Americans won a huge victory when the Elder Justice Act (EJA) was finally signed into law, the most comprehensive federal legislation to combat elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Once funded, the enactment of this landmark legislation will foster:

- **A National Commitment.** For the first time ever, efforts to prevent elder abuse will be coordinated at the federal level.
- **Understanding of Elder Abuse.** The EJA authorizes funding to jump-start research and raise public awareness of this crisis in our country.
- **Detection and Prevention of Abuse.** Pilot projects will be evaluated to identify successful approaches to elder abuse detection, prevention, and victim services and then the sharing of best practices will be coordinated.
- **Protections for Older Americans.** The EJA provides for desperately needed resources for state and community efforts and those who work on the front lines to prevent and prosecute elder abuse.
- **Prosecution of Elder Abuse Perpetrators.** The Act supports the investigation of abuse and development of a forensic program (similar to programs that already exist for child abuse).

Enactment of the EJA is an important step forward for seniors. However, we, as individuals, communities, and a country, have to work together to fully invest in and leverage these new protections so older Americans never have to confront abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation.

**Sources: Administration on Aging, National Center on Elder Abuse; MetLife Mature Market Institute, *Broken Trust, Elders, Families and Finances*, March 2009. OWL, *Elder Abuse: A Woman's Issue*, March 2009.**

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