

[World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 15 June]



Addressing the Quality of Life for Aging Adults

In 2013, the U.S. Census recorded that 14% of the American population (44.7 million) was age 65. Florida has 18.7% of its population over 65 and by 2040, Florida's population is expected to double. Whereas by 2050, people age 65 and older are expected to comprise 20% of the total U.S. population, in Florida 20% of the population is over 65 by 2020. Increased longevity can enable longer rich and meaningful lives. The growth in elders however, can also bring elder abuse and financial exploitation.

June 15th is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, a day to inform and educate people around the world about the prevalence and incidence of elder abuse, as well as to promote prevention and intervention activities to decrease and end abuse of elderly populations. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that 1 in 10 elders suffer from any form of elder abuse. Research also indicates that people with dementia are at greater risk of elder abuse than those without dementia.

Elder abuse is any form of mistreatment that results in harm to an older person. Elder abuse is manifested in many forms, from physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, psychological abuse, financial abuse, and neglect. Financial exploitation is estimated to hurt 5% of older adults and is perpetuated by family "friends", caregivers, and predatory outsiders.

The impact of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of elderly individuals has a profound fiscal cost. The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates the direct medical costs associated with violent injuries to older adults add over \$5.3 billion to the nation's annual health expenditures, and the annual financial loss by victims of elder financial exploitation is estimated to be \$2.9 billion.

More importantly, elder abuse significantly affects an individual's quality of life. Elderly persons who reported being abused and neglected report poorer health; poorer health is strongly associated with mortality and adverse health outcomes. Functional impairment leads to dependency and vulnerability in the elderly. As people have more difficulty performing activities of daily living, whether through normal aging, disability, or dementia, they are more likely to suffer neglect and psychological abuse.

In its factsheets on elder abuse, the National Center on Elder Abuse reports that 30% of older adults with disabilities, who used personal assistance services for support of activities of daily living, reported one or more types of abuse by their primary provider. For individuals living in

nursing homes, one study found that over 50% of nursing home staff admitted to mistreating older patients. Two thirds of those incidents involved neglect.

The Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging, a Research Center within the School of Aging Studies in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences at the University of South Florida, is dedicated to improving the lives of older adults through development of relevant policy research for Florida and the nation. Created in 1992 with a legislatively mandated mission to conduct research and policy analysis, the Center encourages and facilitates interdisciplinary and cross-university policy-related research with faculty and doctoral students within USF, especially with the Florida Mental Health Institute, and has encouraged research with other Florida Universities, and with long-term care researchers across the country.



Led by Dr. Kathryn Hyer, the Center focuses on a number of policy areas. Studies in assisted living facilities and nursing homes, for example, examine the relationships of quality of care, transitions and trajectories of care, and types of care and the impacts on residents and staff. End of life issues are a core topic area of study, as is training for workers helping persons with dementia or behavioral health disorders who reside in residential and community settings. Drs. Debra Dobbs and Hongdao Meng are active researchers in end-of-life care and Dr. Victor Molinari leads efforts to improve mental health services for older adults. Dr. William Haley leads research focused on caregivers and caregiver stress.

Since adults with lower incomes are the most likely to experience mistreatment, the Center also focuses on care provided to persons who are dually eligible (Medicaid and Medicare) and staffing levels on quality of care. Recently, with the shift to a Medicaid-managed long-term care model, the Center is examining the impact of such a shift to the care of the elderly who are enrolled in these plans.

Dr. Hyer reminds us of the importance of a systemic view of elder abuse, “Financial exploitation is not a victimless crime. It clearly hurts the elder but the social and economic consequences of misusing or stealing financial resources leaves many elders as a ward of the state, costing our public health, guardianship, and long-term care system a great deal of money”.

Since elder abuse is a growing social and public health issue, it is important to consider some of the challenges older individuals may face that may lead to elder abuse. Older adults may be especially vulnerable to misunderstanding complex issues (mental capacity) and be unable to give informed consent. They may also be vulnerable to undue influence by caregivers or family members. Substance abuse is the most frequently cited risk factor associated with elder abuse. Substance abuse affects both victims and perpetrators. Older adults may also face challenges as to their autonomy, self-determination, and the use of least restrictive interventions, alternatives, and settings. Researchers within the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences are working to help end elder abuse and improve the quality of life for older adults.

For more about aging in Florida, research and career opportunities, and the implications of aging visit Florida Policy Exchange Center on Aging ([website](#)), or the School of Aging Studies () or

contact Dr. Kathryn Hyer at khyer@usf.edu. The Center's Training Academy on Aging is the designated contractor for the Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Training Provider and Curriculum Approval Program.

Serving nearly 48,000 students, the [University of South Florida](#) is one of the largest public universities in the nation, and among the top 50 universities, public or private, for federal research expenditures. The [College of Behavioral & Community Sciences](#) serves more than 2,600 students with six undergraduate, nine masters, and five doctoral programs housed in seven academic departments/schools. Its [School of Aging Studies](#), established in 1967, is one of the nation's oldest and largest degree-awarding programs in Gerontology, and its Ph.D. in Aging Studies program, which began in 1994, has gained national prominence.