



Spring 2017 — Field Action Report

Interfaith Approach to Elder Abuse: Developing a Screening Tool to Assist Faith Leaders Reporting of Elder Abuse

Olayinka Agboola MB.ChB, Suraj Arshanapally, Haeyoon Chang, Elina Kurkurina MPH,
Erin Burk-Leaver MPH MA, Joan Monin, PhD, Laura Snow MPH, Debbie Humphries, PhD

BACKGROUND

- The National Elder Mistreatment Study in 2010 reported that 11.4% of elders in the United States experienced some form of elder abuse¹. Elder abuse significantly impacts the victims' health and well-being, which contributes to health disparities². The five main types of elder abuse are physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual assault, material exploitation, and neglect³.
- Elders who are active members of a religious organization maintain strong relationships with their religious identities⁴. In fact, a 2005 study found a high percentage of older women reported they would seek help from their place of worship if they experienced abuse⁵. Faith leaders may, therefore, be important partners in advocating for elder justice. However, the same 2005 study found the cases of elder abuse entrusted to faith leaders are rarely reported to agencies or authorities that can assist with care⁵.
- Faith leaders face barriers in responding to elder abuse, including lack of training opportunities, rules of confidentiality, and the absence of religious communities from the table when resources for elder abuse victims are provided in the context of medical support^{5,6,7}. Faith leaders may be essential partners in the prevention of elder abuse, if these challenges are to be overcome. An intervention that focuses on developing a tool that faith leaders can utilize to detect and report elder abuse may be an important approach.
- This report presents findings from a survey and interviews in the state of Connecticut exploring an interfaith approach to elder abuse prevention.

OBJECTIVES

- Assess faith leaders' baseline knowledge and attitudes towards elder abuse.
- Identify barriers faith leaders experience in responding to elder abuse.
- Investigate elders' trust networks, factors that determine elders' trust with faith leaders, and the barriers elders experience in reporting difficult problems.
- Develop a tool to help faith leaders detect and respond to elder abuse effectively.

METHODS

Online Questionnaire

- Questions covered general knowledge of elder abuse, baseline knowledge on reporting, barriers to reporting, detection standards, availability of resources, perceptions of trust, and confidence in reporting, adapted from Dr. John Rudnick's 2008 dissertation, ref. 9, below
- Administered online via Qualtrics software to 62 faith leaders in Southern Connecticut.
- Data analyzed with SAS

Qualitative Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with 12 community dwelling elders in New Haven, CT.
- Interview domains included trust, involvement with faith community, and experiences discussing difficult topics with faith leaders.
- Data analyzed with Dedoose

KEY FINDINGS

- **75.0%** of faith leaders believe they have a good relationship with elders in their congregation and believe the elders within their congregation would feel comfortable talking to them about their personal problems.
- **57.7%** of faith leaders believe elders in their congregation would feel comfortable coming to them if they were victims of elder abuse.
- **19.3%** of faith leaders report being confident in their ability to detect elder abuse.
- **36.6%** of faith leaders believe they have sufficient resources to aid in the prevention and intervention of elder abuse.

REFERENCES

1. Aciermo, R., Hernandez, M. A., Amstadter, A. B. et al. (2010). Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the United States: The National Elder Mistreatment Study. *American Journal of Public Health*. 100:292-297.
2. Lachs, M. S., Williams, C. S., O'Brien, S., Pillemer, K. A., & Charlson, M. E. (1998). The mortality of elder mistreatment. *JAMA*, 280(5), 428-432. doi: 10.1001/jama.280.5.428
3. Lachs, M. S., & Pillemer, K. (2004). Elder abuse. *The Lancet*, 364(9441), 1263-1272.
4. Young, G., & Dowling, W. (1987). Dimensions of religiosity in old age: Accounting for variation in types of participation. *Journal of Gerontology*, 42(4), 376-380.
5. Podnieks, E. & Wilson, S., (2005). Raising Awareness of Abuse of Older Persons: An Issue for Faith Communities? *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 17(1-2), 55-86. doi:10.1300/j496v17n01_04
6. Pieper, H., & Garrison, T. (1992). "Knowledge of Social Aspects of Aging Among Pastors" *Journal of Religious Gerontology*. 8(4): 89-105.
7. Moskowitz, Seymour, and Michael J. DeBoer. "When Silence Resounds: Clergy and the Requirement to Report Elder Abuse and Neglect." *DePaul L. Rev.* 49 (1999):
8. https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/clergy/elder.htm
9. Rodnick, John R. (2008). "Elder Abuse and Neglect: A Survey of Clergy Awareness, Knowledge, Intervention Preferences, and Perceived Severity." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Argosy University, Sarasota.

RESULTS

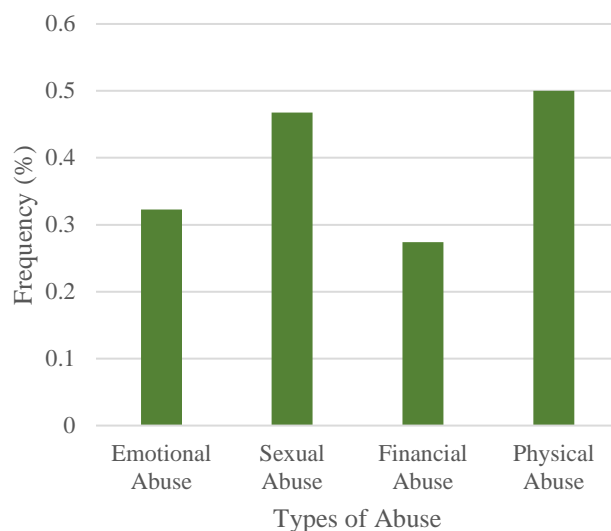
Online Questionnaire

- The faith leader sample was predominantly male (67.4%, n=33), Caucasian (89.8%, n=44), and married (72.9%, n=35) with a mean age of 52.9 years (SD=12.0) and approximately 20.5 years (SD=12.2) years of experience as a faith leader.
- Faith leaders were most familiar with physical abuse (50%, 31/62) and least familiar with emotional abuse (32%, 19/62), and financial abuse (27%, 20/62).
- 95.8% (n=46) of faith leaders have access to websites and 91.7% (n=44) of faith leaders have access to computers.
- The barriers in elder abuse reporting included 1) lack of resources in reporting, and 2) lack of confidence in detection.

Qualitative Interviews

- The majority of elder participants were white, female, Jewish, and non-Hispanic. The mean age was 76.5 (SD=5.3).
- Elders reported having positive relationships with their faith leaders and valued faith leaders who were honest, caring, helpful, kind, calm, smart, and respected privacy.

Types of elder abuse the faith leaders find most familiar due to its services or programs for prevention



LIMITATIONS

- Only the faith leaders who had internet access and email accounts were recruited.
- Online questionnaire reached predominantly Christian faith leaders.
- The data was limited to faith leaders practicing in Southern Connecticut, thus the generalizability and reproducibility of the detection and reporting tool is uncertain.
- The Digital Detection Tool has been developed based on the survey and interviews, but still needs to be piloted and validated with faith leaders and other community experts.

CONCLUSION

In order to reduce the prevalence of elder abuse in Southern Connecticut, it is important to raise the awareness on the issue of elder abuse among leaders, and emphasize the important role they play in responding to cases of elder abuse. The use of a digital detection tool could provide a website where faith leaders can access information on elder abuse, and resources available for all five types of elder abuse prevalent in Southern Connecticut towns.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- The use of a digital detection tool for faith leaders for elder abuse can be a starting point in raising awareness of elder abuse and encouraging effective response to elder abuse prevention and intervention.
- In the future, the digital detection tool for faith leaders for elder abuse should be pilot tested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Erin Burk-Leaver (site preceptor), Elina Kurkurina (Teaching Fellow), Dr. Debbie Humphries (Course Instructor), Dr. Jack Rudnick (Professor, Thomas More College), Ms. Jackie Curl (CEO, Tower One/East), Dr. Joan Monin (Principal Investigator), Ms. Joanne McGloin (Yale Program on Aging), Laura Snow (site preceptor) for their guidance and support in executing this project. We would like to thank the Residents of Tower One/East and the faith leader participants for their service and contributions to this project.