

# Elder Abuse

## A Growing Concern in the African American Community

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Each year hundreds of thousands of older persons are abused, neglected, and exploited by family members and others. Many victims are people who are frail, vulnerable, and depend on others to meet their most basic needs.

Currently, elder abuse is defined by state laws, and state definitions vary considerably from one jurisdiction to another in terms of what constitutes the mistreatment of the elderly. Generally accepted definitions are:

- **Physical abuse** is the willful infliction of physical pain or injury, e.g., slapping, bruising, sexually molesting, or restraining.
- **Sexual abuse** is the infliction of non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.
- **Psychological abuse** is the infliction of mental or emotional anguish, e.g., humiliating, intimidating, or threatening.
- **Financial or material exploitation** is the improper act or process of an individual, using the resources of an older person, without his/her consent, for someone else's benefit.
- **Neglect** is the failure of a caretaker to provide goods or services necessary to avoid physical harm, mental anguish, or mental illness, e.g., abandonment, denial of food or health-related services.

According to the first-ever *National Elder Abuse Incidence Study*, released in 1998, our oldest elders (80 years and over) are abused and neglected at two to three times their proportion of the elderly population—with female elders abused at a higher rate than males.

While the study indicates that White elders are victims of abuse more often than other racial and ethnic groups (eight out of ten times for most types of maltreatment), the incidence of abuse among elderly

African Americans is a growing concern. Blacks are over-represented in nearly all types of maltreatment relative to their proportion of the elderly population. More specifically:

- **Emotional/psychological abuse** was the second most frequent type of maltreatment, with 35.5 percent of victims. African American elders were over-represented (14.1 percent) as victims of this type of maltreatment.
- **Physical abuse** was the third most frequent type of elder maltreatment, with 25.6 percent of abuse victims. African American elders comprised approximately 9.0 percent.
- **Financial/material exploitation** was the fourth most frequent type of maltreatment, with 30.2 percent of all elder abuse victims. Again, African American elders were over-represented, and comprised 15.4 percent of abuse victims of this type.
- **Abandonment** accounted for only 3.6 percent of all victims of elder abuse. Interestingly, the percentages of White victims (41.3 percent) and African American victims (57.3 percent) for this type of abuse were very close, but with the African American population significantly over-represented than its proportion of the elderly population (8.3 percent).
- **Self-neglecting** elders were predominately White (77.4 percent), while 20.9 percent were African American and 1.7 percent were other or unknown. The African American elderly are two-and-a-half times more likely to be self-neglecting than their proportion of the elderly population.

For more information on elder abuse or to view the entire study, go to <http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/abuse/report/default.htm> ❖

### Need more information on elder abuse? Consider the following:

**The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA)**, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging, is a resource for public and private agencies, professionals, service providers, and individuals interested in elder abuse prevention information, training, technical assistance, and research. For more information, go to <http://www.elderabusecenter.org>

**The National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA)** is an association of researchers, practitioners, educators, and advocates dedicated to protecting the safety, security, and dignity of America's most vulnerable citizens. For more information, go to <http://www.preventelderabuse.org/>



*Understanding and Combating Elder Abuse in Minority Communities* details proceedings of a 1997 conference sponsored by the NCEA and funded by the Archstone Foundation. Single copies are available at no cost from the Archstone Foundation. For more information, go to <http://www.archstone.org>

