

Elder mistreatment essay samples

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OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE OF ELDER MISTREATMENT

As the years go by, people are living much longer. According to the National Institute on Aging (N. d.), “ life expectancy nearly doubled during the 20th century with a ten-fold increase in the number of Americans age 65 or older.” The organization continues to say that there are about 35 million Americans who are around 65 years old or older, and this number will continue to grow in the coming years. However, longer lives don’t always mean better lives. Because elders are more vulnerable and their physical and mental strengths decrease with age, they are also at risk of mistreatment or abuse. The World Health Organization (2002) provides a definition of elder abuse as “ a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.” Based on the same report, elder abuse exists even during the ancient times. However, it is usually hidden from the public until the 20th century when initiatives to address the issues of child abuse and domestic violence started to emerge (World Health Organization 2002). According to several studies carried out in the past decades in Canada, Netherlands, United States, Great Britain, and Finland, around 4-6% of elders experience some form of physical, psychological, financial abuse, and neglect (World Health Organization 2002). Because of the possibility that more and more people will continue to live longer in the coming years, there will also be more elders who may become victims of elder abuse if this issue isn’t properly address. Thus, further discussion of this topic and other related information is important.

CAUSES OF ELDER MISTREATMENT

The elder population, just like others, deserves to be treated fairly. It is their human right to be protected and cared for. In the United States, there are several laws that govern this right, and one of these laws is the Older Americans Act. According to Fox-Grage and Ujvari (N. d.), the Older Americans Act or OAA “ provides critical services—such as homedelivered and congregate meals, family caregiver support, in-home assistance, preventive health services, transportation, job training, protection from abuse, and other supportive services.” Because the rights of the elders are protected by the law, anyone who abuses or mistreats an old person is deemed as deviant.

Deviance from the norm or the expected caring behavior towards elders is caused by many factors. The National Institute of Justice (2013) mentions six possible causes for elder abuse. First, the abusers are possibly influenced by the violent behaviors that they have witnessed and learned from others as a way to resolve their problems or a way to achieve their goals. For instance, if the caregiver has friends or peers who are also abusers, there is a possibility that they would adopt the same behavior. Second, the abusers possibly feel unrecognized or unappreciated, and the abuse happens as their way to get even. For example, if the caregiver is a family member and is not being compensated or appreciated for his/her efforts, he/she may feel that his/her situation of having to look after the elder is unfair. Because of this, he/she will see the abuse as a fair act. Third, the abusers may have come from families where there is history of violence. Fourth, the abusers use mistreatment to gain power and control. Fifth, the abusers may have been caused by other

factors, such as personal and societal influences that surround the abuser/caregiver. Lastly, the abuse may have been caused by social characteristics and the nature of relationship of both the elder and the abuser within the environment that they share together.

Some of the behaviors of the abuser, who is often times the caregiver or a family member of the elder, can be best explained by the sociological theories of deviance. For instance, Robert K. Merton described five types of deviance in his Social-Strain Typology Theory; these types are conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion (Cragun et al. 2006). When the abuser learns from others that violence/mistreatment is an effective way to resolve an issue or attain a goal, he/she will perceive violence as the norm. As a result, when he/she employs abuse, the action may be classified as the first type of deviance: conformity. The abuser believes that he/she is conforming to what he/she perceives as normal. According to Cragun et al. (2006: 103), “conformity involves the acceptance of the cultural goals and means of attaining those goals.” On the other hand, there is the Social Disorganization Theory. This theory, according to Sampson, offers “a specification of the effects of neighborhood characteristics on the capacity and ability of community residents to implement and maintain public norms” (Krohn, Lizotte, and Hall 2009). In other words, elder abuse is more likely to happen in communities or places where there is weak social bond and a caregiver or family member is most likely to become an abuser if he/she grew up in an environment where there are consistent violence and abuse. This theory reflects the third and fifth causes of elder mistreatment mentioned by the National Institute of Justice. Now, depending on the

possible cause of elder mistreatment, the abuser's perception towards his/her deviant behavior varies. For instance, if the abuse is caused by the caregiver's perception of being unfairly treated or lack of recognition, he/she may perceive the abuse as acceptable and "fair." Moreover, if the abuser believes that violence is normal in order to properly manage and control the elder, as explained by conformity, then, the abuser will view his/her behavior as normal and not deviant.

EFFECTS OF ELDER MISTREATMENT

Different forms of elder abuse or mistreatment creates different effects, and all of these effects are negative. The most easily observed effect of elder abuse is caused by physical abuse. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015), physical effects include wounds, injuries, physical pain, soreness, nutrition deficiencies, increased susceptibility to diseases, burns, and many others. Moreover, both physical elder abuse and psychological elder abuse cause several psychological effects. These include the development of fear, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and learned helplessness. Furthermore, elders who experience abuse are more at risk of death than others. In a study conducted in New Haven, CT, United States, results showed that 9% of the abused elders die earlier compared to the elders who never experienced any form of abuse (World Health Organization 2002). All these effects are products of deviant behaviors of abusers, which must be resolved or eliminated.

RESPONSES FOR THE RESOLUTION OF ELDER ABUSE

Despite the laws which intend to protect the elder population, abuse and mistreatment continue to happen. According to World Health Organization (2002), efforts are continuously being given to develop national and local responses to the issue of elder abuse. For instance, a national-level response of the National Center on Elder Abuse is already fully developed. It has a system of reporting elder abuse and a system to address each reported case. The World Health Organization (2002) adds that the National Center on Elder Abuse “ gives technical assistance and a small amount of funding to the states for their elder abuse prevention services.” Furthermore, there is also the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. This non-profit organization is also a form of national-level response to the issue of elder abuse. In addition, the National Association of State Adult Protective Services Administrators also offers an established system that help address the issue of elder abuse on a national level. On the other hand, there are also local responses towards the issue. These come in the form of social services, health care, and legal systems (World Health Organization 2002). For instance, the Finnish Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, together with local nursing homes and the Finnish Healthcare System, assist abused victims by providing emergency shelters in the nursing homes, support group, and telephone helpline to obtain advice when needed, which may also be a venue for the elders to discuss their abusive situations. In the United States, there are also institutions that offer emergency shelters for abused elders. The same goes for Canada, Germany, and Japan (World Health Organization 2002). In other countries, these social services are not

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offered, but other forms of local responses may still be developed. For instance, there are elder people in Guatemala, those who were forced to leave their homes by their families, who established their own committee. According to Checkoway, these elders developed their own shelter as well as income-generating projects to help supply their needs (World Health Organization 2002). Together with established laws, all these national and local responses will continue to help protect and safeguard the elder population against abuse and mistreatment.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it is important to understand and address the issue of elder abuse. This is because more and more people, according to studies, will live longer in the coming years. In other words, more people will be at risk of being unfairly treated, harmed, and uncared for in the future. The Social-Strain Typology Theory and the Social Disorganization Theory are just some of the ideas that may help explain why such abuse occurs. Often times, the deviant behaviors of the abusers are caused by different social and environmental factors. For instance, culture, personal experiences, family, and peers, may all contribute to the development of deviant or abusive behaviors. Moreover, elder abuse takes different forms, such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, and even sexual abuse. Depending on which type of abuse the victim suffers from, the effects of it also varies. However, what remains constant is the fact that any kind of elder abuse is debilitating and must not be tolerated. By understanding all these concepts about elder abuse, determining and developing the proper response, whether in the

national or local level, will be more valuable in addressing the issue in its entirety.

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