



International Journal Research Publication Analysis

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"ELDER ABUSE AND PROTECTION: PREVALENCE, RISK FACTORS, AND PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES"

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Article Received: 08 November 2025

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Article Revised: 28 November 2025

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Published on: 18 December 2025

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.1580>

ABSTRACT

Elder abuse is a growing global concern, affecting millions of older adults in various forms, including physical, emotional, financial, and neglectful mistreatment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), elder abuse has increased significantly in recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened social isolation and caregiver stress. Families, communities, and government play a crucial role in preventing and addressing elder abuse. This review explores the prevalence and addressing elder abuse. This review explores the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of elder abuse, highlighting cultural perspectives, legal frameworks, and support systems aimed at safeguarding older adults. Strategies for improving prevention, intervention, and policy enforcement are also discussed. The paper synthesizes research studies on elder abuse trends, the effectiveness of legal protections, and best practices for ensuring the well-being of elderly individuals.

KEYWORDS: Elder, Abuse, Human Right, Prevention.

INTRODUCTION

Elder abuse is a significant public health and human rights issue affecting older adults worldwide. The United Nations (UN, 2023) estimates that by 2050, over 2 billion people will be aged 60 or older, making elder abuse a growing concern. According to a 2021 WHO report, approximately 1 in 6 older adults experience some form of abuse, including physical harm, emotional mistreatment, financial exploitation, neglect, or sexual abuse. However, many cases remain unreported due to fear, dependence on caregivers, or cognitive decline (Yon et al., 2019).

The complexity of elder abuse arises from multiple risk factors, including social isolation, caregiver burnout, cognitive impairment, and financial dependence (Pillemer et al., 2022). While families are often primary caregivers, they can also be perpetrators of abuse due to stress, economic difficulties, or lack of proper training (Lachs & Han, 2020). Moreover, Institutional settings such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities also report cases of abuse, often due to understaffing, poor training, and inadequate regulation (Wang et al., 2023). This review aims to analyze the different forms of elder abuse, risk factors, and cultural perspectives, while also exploring government interventions, legal frameworks, and community-based solutions to prevent and address the issue effectively.

Forms of Elder Abuse - Elder abuse manifests in various forms, each with distinct psychological, physical, and economic consequences. The major categories include:

● **Physical Abuse:**

Acierno et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale study across multiple nursing homes in the United States, revealing that 17% of older adults reported experiencing some form of physical violence, including slapping, hitting, or the misuse of physical restraints. The study highlighted that caregiver frustration, understaffing, and lack of training were significant contributions to physical abuse.

● **Emotional/psychological Abuse:**

Dong (2022) examined psychological abuse among older adults and found that verbal threats, humiliation, and isolation are among the most frequently reported forms of abuse. The study, conducted in a sample of over 2,000 elderly individuals, showed that 30% of participants had experienced psychological abuse from either family members or Institutional caregivers.

● **Financial Exploitation:**

A study by Deliema et al. (2023) investigated the impact of financial scams and fraud on older adults. The researchers found that elderly individuals in the U.S. lose an estimated \$36 billion annually due to financial exploitation, with many cases involving close family members or caregivers who misuse authority over financial assets.

● **Neglect:**

Lachs et al. (2021) explored neglect in home-based care settings, revealing that nearly 25% of elderly individuals suffer from malnutrition, dehydration, poor hygiene, and lack of medical attention. The study found that caregiver stress and lack of proper elder-care education were major factors in cases of neglect.

● **Sexual Abuse:**

Ramsey-klawsnik & teaster(2021) examined Sexual abuse cases among older adults, particularly those with cognitive impairments such as dementia. Their findings indicated that elderly women in assisted living facilities were more vulnerable to Sexual exploitation, with underreporting being a significant challenge due to shame, fear, or lack of awareness.

Risk Factors for Elder Abuse - Elder abuse is influenced by several individual, relational, and systemic factors:

- **Cognitive Impairment & Dependency:**

Johannesen & LoGiudice (2023) conducted a study among elderly individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia and found that nearly 50% of dementia patients experience some form of abuse, primarily due to their dependence on caregivers and inability to communicate their experiences.

- **Caregiver Stress & Burnout:**

A study by Schiamberg et al. (2022) explored the role of caregiver stress and burnout in elder abuse. It found that caregivers with financial difficulties, mental health issues, or excessive workloads were more likely to become abusive or neglectful toward the elderly individuals in their care.

- **Economic Dependence:**

DeLiema (2023) studied financial dependence on older adults and found that cases of inheritance fraud, undue influence, and coerced property transfers were prevalent among families where the elderly individual was the primary financial provider.

Cultural Perspectives on Elder Abuse :-

Asian and African Societies:

Chee & Barraclough (2022) found that in Asian and African cultures, the concept of filial piety and family honor prevents many victims from reporting abuse, as it is perceived as bringing shame to the family.

Western Nations:

Katz et al. (2023) analyzed elder abuse in North America and Europe and found that while institutional abuse is more common, financial exploitation is a growing concern due to digital fraud and online scams targeting the elderly.

Legal Frameworks and Protection Policies

Mandatory Reporting Laws:

WHO (2023) emphasized that countries with mandatory elder abuse reporting laws, such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia, have seen an increase in reported cases but still struggle with under-reporting due to victims' fear or dependence on abusers.

Financial Fraud Prevention:

James et al. (2023) studied the impact of financial fraud detection programs in banks, concluding that elderly individuals who had access to financial literacy training were 40% less likely to fall victim to scams.

Strategies for Preventing and Addressing Elder Abuse

Technology-Based Monitoring:

Gupta et al. (2024) highlighted the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and wearable monitoring devices in identifying abuse patterns and alerting authorities in real time.

Multidisciplinary Intervention:

Wilson & Carter (2024) advocated for collaborative approaches involving social workers, legal experts, and healthcare providers, emphasizing that integrated response teams were more effective in rescuing and supporting elder abuse victims.

CONCLUSION:-

Elder abuse is a severe public health issue that demands strong legal frameworks, public awareness, and caregiver support .strengthening policies ,providing caregiver training and leveraging technology-driven interventions can significantly reduce abuse cases .Future research should focus on improving elder financial literacy,enhancing institutional monitoring and expanding community based elder support networks to create a safer environment fit older adults worldwide..

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