

May 2010 - Newsletter

Sad Secrets

By Pam Brandon, Family Caregiver Education,
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Much is written in the news about abuse of children, violence against women and even animal neglect. From time to time, there is the finding of a nursing home sighted as having neglected its patients. But the fact is that only 4% of older adults live in nursing homes, and because of increased monitoring, nursing home abuse cases are in decline.

The secret? According to the American Psychological Association, every year an estimated 2.1 million older Americans are victims of physical, psychological or other forms of abuse and neglect. Those statistics may not tell the whole story. For every case of elder abuse and neglect reported to authorities, experts estimate that there may be as many as five cases that have not been reported. Recent research suggests that elder who have been abused tend to die earlier than those who are not abused, even in the absence of chronic conditions or life threatening disease.

Most elder abuse takes place in the home. Because the far majority of seniors live on their own, with a spouse, children, sibling or other relative, family members and paid caregivers are usually the abusers. Often the abuse is subtle and not always easy to discern.

Elder abuse can be the infliction of physical, emotional, or psychological harm on an older adult. It can also take the form of financial exploitation or intentional or unintentional neglect by the caregiver. Over or under medicating, depriving the elder of food, or exposing the person to severe weather – deliberately or inadvertently, name-calling, threatening remarks, or giving the “silent treatment” are other forms of mental abuse.

Financial exploitation can range from misuse of an elder’s funds, to embezzlement, fraud, taking money under false pretenses, forgery, forced property transfers, or denying the older person access to his or her own funds or home.

It is important to understand that while abuse comes in many guises, the net effect is the same. Abuse creates potentially dangerous situations and feelings of worthlessness, and it isolates the older person from people who can help.

Caregiver stress, mental or emotional illness, addiction to alcohol or drugs, financial crisis and dependency can all increase the likelihood that elder abuse may take place.

As a community of caregivers, we must first take care of ourselves, so that we do not fall victim to abusing our loved ones. Secondly, we must be diligent in watching out for other caregivers and older adults. When we see signs of abuse, we must act on our

instincts. Talk to the persons involved, let family members know there is a concern, and if need be, report the abuse to authorities– physicians, public nurses, police, community centers, social workers and others. In Texas, a call to 211 is all it takes to report elder abuse. It is our responsibility to collectively care for and reach out to our older adults with compassion and respect.

**For information about home-delivered meals, help with transportation;
and caregiver services, call
Meals-on-Wheels of Johnson and Ellis Counties
(817) 558-2840, (972) 351-9943,
or email info@mowjec.org**