

## More than 10 percent of older Americans suffer mistreatment

August 19 2008

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About 13 percent of elderly Americans are mistreated, most commonly by someone who verbally mistreats or financially takes advantage of them, according to a University of Chicago study that is the first comprehensive look at elder mistreatment in the country.

"The population of the country is aging, and people now live with chronic diseases longer. So it's important to understand, from a health perspective, how people are being treated as they age," said lead author Edward Laumann, the George Herbert Mead Distinguished Service Professor in Sociology at the University of Chicago.

Other studies have been based on small, non-representative samples of the population or on data gathered from the criminal justice system or welfare agencies such as adult protection services. They are not as comprehensive as the new study, which was made in response to a report from the National Research Council calling for scientific study of elder mistreatment.

Laumann and his research team found that 9 percent of adults reported verbal mistreatment, 3.5 percent reported financial mistreatment and 0.2 percent reported physical mistreatment. Physical impairment apparently plays a role in mistreatment, the study found.

"Older people with any physical vulnerability are about 13 percent more likely than those without one to report verbal mistreatment but are not

more likely to report financial mistreatment," said co-author Linda Waite, the Lucy Flower Professor in Sociology at the University.

Their study showed that adults in their late 50s and 60s are more likely to report verbal or financial mistreatment than those who are older. "Perhaps the respondents are including fairly routine arguments, perhaps about money, with their spouse, sibling or child in their reports or perhaps older adults are more reticent to report negative behavior," Laumann said.

The findings, which found wide variations in mistreatment depending on age and ethnicity, were reported in "Elder Mistreatment in the U.S.: Prevalence Estimates from a Nationally-Representative Study," published in the current issue of the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*.

The study found that females were about twice as likely to report verbal mistreatment, but no higher level of financial mistreatment, than men; Latinos were about half as likely as whites to report verbal mistreatment and 78 percent less likely to report financial mistreatment; and blacks were 77 percent more likely to report financial mistreatment than whites.

Regarding mistreatment, respondents were asked about the past 12 months and answer three questions: "Is there anyone who insults you or puts you down?" (verbal); "Is there anyone who has taken your money or belongings without your OK or prevented you from getting them, even when you ask?" (financial); and "Is there anyone who hits, kicks, slaps or throws things at you?" (physical).

Of the people reporting verbal mistreatment, 26 percent identified their spouse or romantic partner as being responsible, 15 percent said their children mistreated them verbally, while the remainder said that a friend, neighbor, co-worker or boss was responsible.

Among people who reported financial mistreatment, 57 percent reported someone other than a spouse, parent or child, usually another relative, was taking advantage of them.

Source: University of Chicago

Citation: More than 10 percent of older Americans suffer mistreatment (2008, August 19)  
retrieved 19 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-08-percent-older-americans-mistreatment.html>

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