

Mistreatment in Chinese elders perceived as a pervasive problem

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Mistreatment of older Chinese adults in the U.S. is perceived to be a pervasive, but underreported, problem, according to a study that used community focus groups composed of elders to explore the issue. Neglect and psychological (verbal and emotional) abuse by caregivers, usually adult children, were the most serious types of mistreatment, they reported.

The study, published in the *Journal of Aging and Health* and led by Dr. XinQi Dong, a geriatrician and researcher at Rush University Medical Center, was conducted in collaboration with a community group called the Chinese American Service League in Chicago. It is one of just a handful of studies dealing with the issue of elder maltreatment among Chinese immigrants, a topic that is rarely discussed in Chinese populations because of high cultural sensitivity about the issue, low level of awareness, reluctance to reveal problems to maintain family harmony and honor, and the perception that elder mistreatment is a private family matter.

“Instead of shying away in our focus group interviews, older adults were vocal about their interests in these topics and their desire to find out proven ways to improve the situation, including how to report cases of elder mistreatment,” Dong said.

The 39 Chinese seniors who participated in the focus groups reported a variety of disturbing accounts of neglect, including caregivers who did not adequately feed an older man or who spoke abusively to an elderly

parent, telling him to die. Accounts were given also of adult children who deceived parents out of financial holdings, property, and food stamps.

The seniors believed that only the local community service center could provide assistance—not a medical doctor or the police, unless a criminal matter was involved in the mistreatment. Even then, many stated they would be reluctant to report a case because of shame or fear of retaliation.

Dong said that elder mistreatment, though largely ignored, is a pressing issue in the U.S. Chinese population. Seniors in the U.S. are particularly vulnerable because of fewer support systems and the stress of adapting to a different culture.

“Understanding how Chinese older adults define and perceive elder mistreatment is crucial, especially when challenges in Chinese immigrant families are likely to increase the vulnerability of [older adults](#),” Dong said.

Provided by Rush University

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