

Efforts are needed to study elder abuse among veterans

November 9 2017

Experts are calling on the Veterans Administration (VA) to promote research, clinical care, and education in the area of elder abuse, furthering the VA's mission of serving those who have served. Such efforts will benefit not only Veterans, but also the many older individuals in the general population who face mistreatment or harm, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse, along with neglect and financial exploitation. A way forward is described in a new Journal of the American Geriatrics Society article.

Many social factors—for example, a lack of support services and community resources, as well as a lack of research—can make conditions ripe for elder abuse. At least 10 percent of [older adults](#) experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation annually in the United States. US Military Veterans may be a group at high risk of abuse based on known risk factors, but very few studies have examined older Veterans experiencing abuse. Lena Makaroun, MD, of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System and the University of Washington, in Seattle, and her colleagues note that the VA has long been a pioneer in research, education, and [clinical care](#) for complex geriatric syndromes.

"Now, in the area of elder abuse, they again have the opportunity to lead by spearheading a research agenda on studying abuse, neglect, and exploitation among older Veterans that is outlined in our paper," said Dr. Makaroun. "Progress made by this research will not only help Veterans, but as we've seen in many instances before this, advances developed within the VA have the potential to greatly impact the care of older

adults nationally. While adults are living longer in this country, we also want them to live better, and part of having a good quality of life in older age, as at any age, is ensuring safety, adequate care, and justice."

Dr. Makaroun also pointed to evidence that older individuals who experience abuse have higher mortality rates, increased risks of dementia, more hospitalizations, and a greater likelihood of being placed in nursing homes. "As we learn more and more about the complexities of this phenomenon, an institution like the VA that has a national scope and can partner with other federal agencies such as the Department of Justice, is uniquely positioned to be an effective leader," she said. "Our paper may be used as a starting point for leaders within the VA interested in pursuing this work, and also suggests opportunities for private-public partnerships, inter-departmental partnerships, and state-federal level partnerships as ways forward."

The authors acknowledge that there have been calls for increased research around [elder abuse](#) within the VA, but to date only one study has been published that looks at abuse, neglect, and exploitation in older Veterans. No matter how old we are, we deserve to be treated justly and as full members of our communities. We can all ensure that remains a reality for us as we age by reporting these or other signs of [abuse](#) to an Adult Protective Services agency that can investigate potentially abusive situations. If you notice that someone in your community is in immediate danger, call 911 or local police as soon as possible for help.

More information: "Veterans Experiencing Elder Abuse: Improving Care for a High-Risk Population About Which Little is Known." Lena K. Makaroun, Laura Taylor, and Tony Rosen. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. Published Online: November 9, 2017, [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15170](#)

Provided by Wiley

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