

# Bullying in Elderly Communities



UDCA Senior Committee Education & Awareness



# WHAT IS BULLYING?

According to the federal government, bullying is defined with the following core elements:

- unwanted aggressive behavior
- observed or perceived power imbalance;
- repetition of behaviors or high likelihood of repetition.



# Elder Bullying?

Geriatricians and aging experts have observed elements of bullying invading many elder communities in the forms of insults and physical gestures that are intimidating.

- The repercussions can be exhibited through verbal; physical and emotional ways that become a pervasive problem.
- Being in a home or facility is a major change in the lives of many senior which can be hard for them to adjust to and handle emotionally.

Elder bullying can occur for numerous reasons linked to changes in the older adults life linked to loss of freedom and independence.

# Bullying

The Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging stated in 2008 alone, there were 2,793 complaints of elderly resident-to-resident abuse in long-term care facilities.



This number only reflects the reported cases of abuse. They estimate that as many as one in five elders have encountered some form of hostility from their peers while in a group setting.



# Transition

It is important to acknowledge that the senior living environment may inadvertently contribute to why a resident may bully.

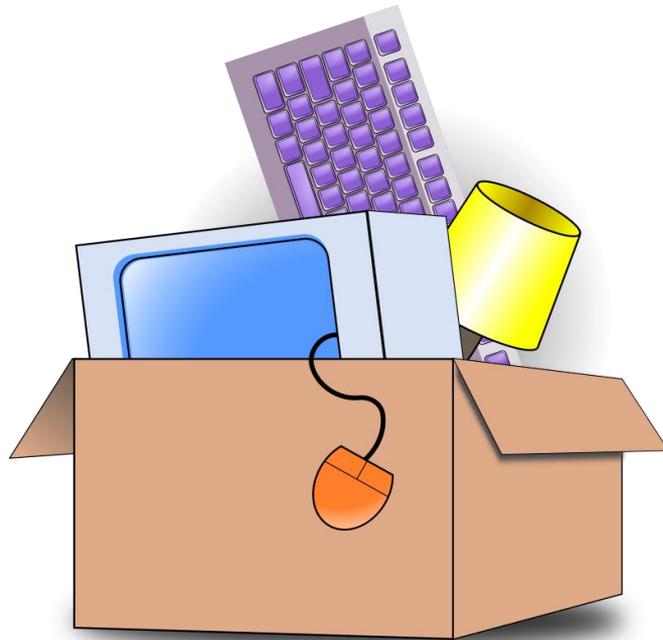


# BULLYING IN OLDER ADULT COMMUNITIES

- The unwanted were turned away from cafeteria tables. Fistfights broke out at karaoke. Dances became breeding grounds for gossip and cruelty.
- It became clear this place had a bullying problem on its hands. What many found surprising was that the perpetrators and victims alike were all senior citizens.

# Change of Environment

Transitioning into an assisted living community can be stressful for some, and new residents may feel a sense of powerlessness moving into a more supportive, communal environment.



# Home Alone versus Group Home

**Change in environment**



**Familiar versus Unfamiliar**



# Relationships

**Based on the level of intimacy and tension a person experiences in any type of relationship has a lot to do with how they manage stress and their emotions.**





# Memories

## Home environment

- Visitation
- Possessions
- Familiarity
- Sanitation
- Space
- Community
- Meals
- Family
- Security



## Nursing home environment

- Staff/in personal
- Scheduled time
- Lack of privacy
- Lack of space
- Increased theft



# TWO TYPES OF STRESS

- **Healthy**

**Stress is an inevitable event caused by either positive or negative reactions to circumstances that strain or exceeds an individuals ability to cope.**

- **Unhealthy**



# TYPICAL VICTIMS of BULLYING

## RISK FACTORS THAT MAY EMPT ACTS OF BULLYING

A new member of the community

Considered to be vulnerable

Doesn't know what to expect from others

Alone; widowed or divorced

Has a scattered support system (family friends)

Heavily dependent on others

Suffering from mental illness

Suffering from depression

Has a change in other health conditions

Has a quiet passive demeanor

Source: Boniface & Frankel 2012

# A GIVEN

One thing that also doesn't change as a person ages is their need for companionship.



# Socialization



CB060558 [RF] © www.visualphotos.com



Studies suggest that most senior-to-senior aggression in long term care settings is verbal abuse, and that men and women are equally likely to be the victim as well as the aggressor

- Source: (Senior Bullying, 2015)

# Rumors a Form of Bullying

- Bullying can be direct (e.g., bullying that occurs in the presence of a targeted individual) and indirect (e.g., bullying not directly communicated to a targeted individual such as spreading rumors)



# INFORMAL RESERVATIONS

Saving seats or reserving spaces for clique members in dining rooms, restaurants, or during outings or other events.



These behaviors seem innocent enough, but can actually be quite hurtful to those outside of the clique who may be isolated or left to dine alone.

# RUMORS

Bullying can happen in any number of places, contexts, or locations.



Broad categories of bullying include physical, verbal, relational (e.g., efforts to harm the reputation or relationships of the targeted individual), and damage to property..

# Verbal or Physical Abuse

- Verbal or physical abuse of victims, which may include yelling, hitting, pushing, or kicking.
- Criticizing or ridiculing another person who does not meet the individual's accepted standards for clothing, social status, religion, sexual orientation, economic background, or virtually any other characteristic or status.

# Verbal abuse

- Bullies may use mannerisms or words to “run the roost or control certain aspect of another elder’s day.
- It’ can be in their tone of voice
- The use of profanity/swearing
- Or words that debase or humiliate





# Physical Gestures

Among elders, physical abuse doesn't have to involve willfully hurting another.

Usually it occurs when an elder makes a physical gesture that's intimidating, such as grabbing a wheel on another elder's wheelchair or pushing a walker to get him out of the way.



# Emotional Abuse

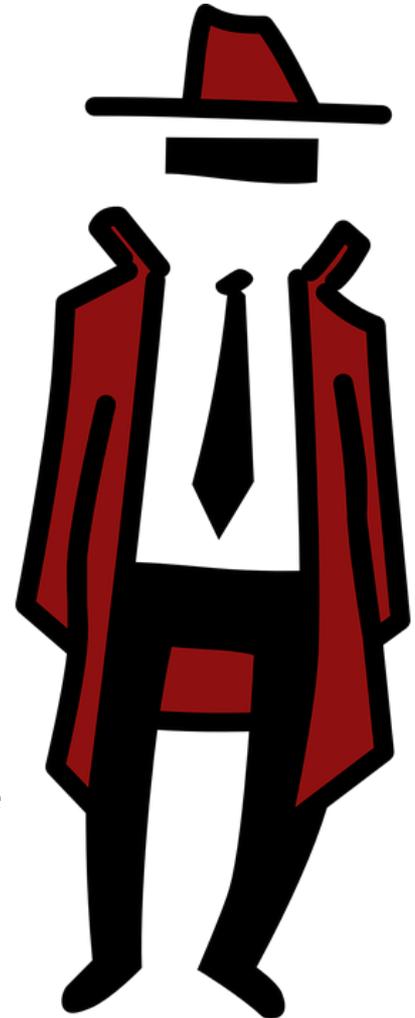
- Emotional abuse can be found in the familiar setting when a resident used to play at a specific bingo table with a group and suddenly that group no longer has a seat for that person.
- Saying negative or unflattering things about the person or group.



# Emotional Scars

Though it leaves no outward scars, elder psychological abuse exploits older adults' vulnerabilities through cruel acts of omission or commission.

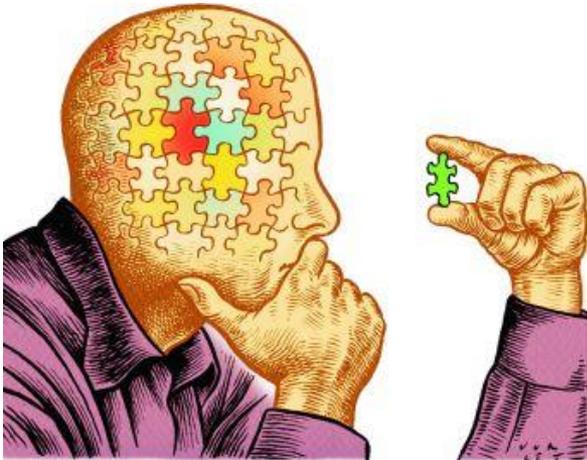
Which can lead to unhealthy stress which has a direct effect on the immune system by affecting the white blood cell levels.



# Self-Worth and



Bullying can cause psychological as well as emotional damage to seniors because it undermines their sense of dignity or self-worth and threatens their psychological well-being.



# Psychological abuse

Can be inflicted by way of verbal and non verbal communications. It is the systematic perpetration of malicious and explicit nonphysical acts against an elder.

Examples include harassment, scolding, insults, denigration, and stalking.

Perpetrators of psychological abuse against older adults often take advantage of elders' vulnerability in ways that control or humiliate the elderly individual.



# Social Withdrawal

An older adults may have been a sweet person previously and then suddenly begins to act mean and out of normal character.

Sometimes it could be the onset of an illness such as dementia or medications.



# DEMENTIA



Dementia can also cause impulse controls to decrease, often stripping residents of their mental filter (Botek, n.d.).

So, residents with dementia may say things that could be construed as verbal bullying

Any attempt to demoralize, dehumanize or intimidate older adults is abuse.



Elder bullying involves forms of ostracism such as:

- Not allowing a person to sit at a particular table during mealtimes
- Barring them from participating in a public activity
- Verbally abuse someone to their face
- Behind-the-back type of passive-aggressive abusive behavior

# Criminal Categories of Bullying



According to the US Department of Health and Human Services some bullying actions can fall into criminal categories

- Harassment
- Hazing
- Assault



# THEFT or DESTRUCTION

- Stealing or destroying property, and/or lying about the victim in order to assert power or authority. For instance, a bully may lie to the administration in a senior living community regarding the victim's actions in order to cast the victim in a poor light.

# Technology and Bullying

- Bullying that occurs using technology (e.g., phones, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and online posts) is considered electronic bullying and is viewed as a context or location.



# Examples of Bullying Behaviors

Physical	Verbal	Relational	Damage to Property
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dirty looks</li><li>• Overbearing physical presence</li><li>• Hitting, kicking or other physical assault</li><li>• Sexual harassment or abuse</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Passive-aggressive comments</li><li>• Negative, critical comments about appearance, personality, etc.</li><li>• Demanding, bossing around a resident</li><li>• Unsolicited or unwelcome sexual comments</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ignoring a resident</li><li>• Gossiping</li><li>• Participating in cliques that conspire to isolate a resident</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stealing items from another resident</li><li>• Damaging items belonging to another resident</li></ul>

# Forms of Bullying

Former Secretary of Aging Linda Rhodes names some additional forms of bullying which may occur in the senior population, including:

- Insults or belittling jokes; bossy behavior
- Spreading rumors or whispering when the victim enters a room
- Invading a victim's personal space
- Criticizing or ridiculing persons with physical or mental disabilities
- Offensive gestures and facial expressions

# WHY NOW as a Senior?

Elder bullies might have likely exhibited this behavior during a lifetime, but as they age factors such as loss of independence, relationships, valued roles, and feeling powerless in a controlled setting can exacerbate the need to exert control and ignite a late-life round of bullying behavior.”

## Typical Traits of Individuals Who Bully

- lacks empathy
- has few friends
- “needs” power and control
- struggles with individual differences
- uses power and control at the expense of others
- suffers from low self-esteem
- empowered by causing conflict, or making others feel threatened, fearful, hurt

Women...



- gossips
- snipes
- member of a clique
- passive-aggressive behavior
- manipulates emotions

Men...

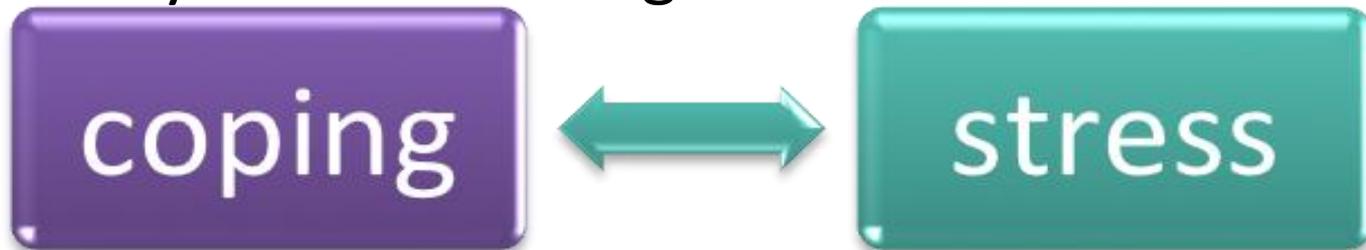


- direct
- spontaneous
- verbally or physically aggressive
- superiority complex
- overly protective

Source: (Bonifas & Frankel, 2012)

# Coping Strategies for Victims of Senior Bullying

- Ignore the behavior in order to remove the bully's perceived power.
- Share your opinion without aggressiveness or implied hostility.
- Avoid interrupting or provoking bullies.
- Maintain eye contact with bullies.
- Try to understand the bully's position or circumstances that may be contributing to these behaviors.



# COPING WITH ELDER ADULT BULLYING

Engage in creating positive living environments which:

- Develop clear rules and expectations for resident and staff behavior.
- Invite everyone to be involved in determining what these rules and expectations should be.

# Elder Abuse has NO borders!



- **SEE IT**
- **REPORT IT**
- **STOP IT**



# REPORTING

An estimated one out of every 10 senior citizens in the United States experiences some type of abuse.

However, fewer than 20 percent of those cases ever get reported, according to the NCEA..



# REPORTING



- Encourage staff and residents to report incidents of bullying and take complaints seriously; staff must feel supported in making reports and in setting limits on inappropriate behavior.

# Solutions



- Residents could be required to sign a code of conduct to treat peers with consideration and respect
- Resident "ambassadors" can help newcomers transition into the community
- Staff members can coach residents on how to handle snubs and aggression
- Staff members can encourage bystanders to act in positive ways when they observe bullying
- Being respectful of possible physical or cognitive impairment
- Offenders could receive a written reprimand or, in the case of multiple complaints, stronger penalties.

# POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS

- Clearly communicate to residents that bullying behavior is unacceptable. If you make your residents sign an anti-bullying policy upon admission and they exhibit such behaviors, warn them that they are in violation of the policy. Often this will have an impact, as residents will not want to endanger their ability to remain in the community. •.

# RESIDENT COUNCIL MEETING

- A **resident council** is an independent, organized group of persons living in a nursing facility who **meet** on a regular basis to discuss concerns, develop suggestions, and plan activities
- The **Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman** Program was created to help address the quality of care and quality of life experience by residents who reside in licensed long term care facilities such as nursing homes, homes for the aged, and adult foster care facilities.

# Long Term Care

Long Term Care Ombudsman

866-485-9393



Violation of residents' rights or dignity  
Physical, verbal or mental abuse, deprivation of services necessary to maintain residents' physical and mental health, or unreasonable confinement  
Poor quality of care, including inadequate personal hygiene and slow response to requests for assistance  
Improper transfer or discharge of patient  
Inappropriate use of chemical or physical restraints  
Any resident concern about quality of care or quality of life



# Elder Abuse and Criminal Law

Individuals accused of committing elder abuse may be prosecuted under a given jurisdiction's general criminal code such as:

- Assault
- Battery
- Fraud
- Theft
- Rape

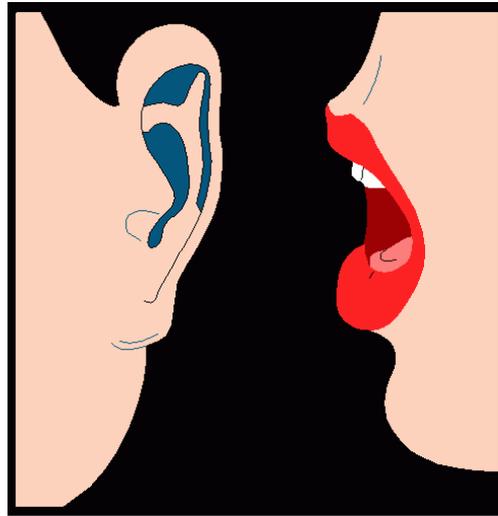


Some states have adopted statutes that provide explicit criminal penalties for elder abuse in its various forms.

Some state legislatures have enacted stricter penalties for certain crimes where senior citizens are the victims.

# Under Reporting

**Elder abuse is underreported**, and the ambiguous definitions used by both legal and social service agencies contribute to the variation in estimating the occurrence.



**1- 855-444-3911**

**For every case that is reported, an estimated five to seven cases go unreported.**

# Adult Protective Services.

Notify the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)  
Statewide 24-Hour Hotline:

- 855-444-3911

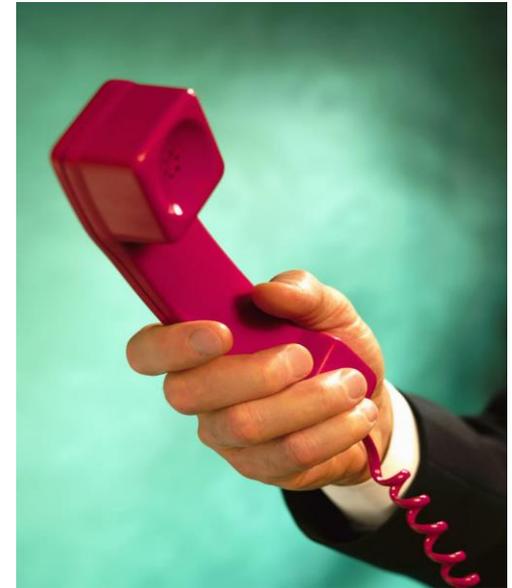
Bureau of Health Services Abuse Hotline:  
800-882-6006

Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, Inc.

- Developmental Disabilities: 800-288-5923
- Mental Illness: 800-288-5923

Attorney General 24-hour Health Care Fraud Hotline: 800-24-ABUSE  
(800-242-2873)

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# Michigan Protection & Advocacy Services, Inc.

106 W. Allegan, Suite 300  
Lansing, MI 48933  
Phone: 517-487-1755



- Developmental Disabilities: 800-288-5923
- Mental Illness: 800-288-5923

## WATCH VIDEO ON SENIOR BULLYING



<https://youtu.be/uB2QPyqbtdY>



**DOES SOMEONE YOU KNOW**  
*- a senior or adult with a disability -  
display any warning signs of mistreatment?*

**Adult Protective Services**  
**1-855-444-3911**

For State reporting numbers visit the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services Agency MDHHS website.

**The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) directed by the U.S. Administration on Aging, helps communities, agencies and organizations ensure that elders and adults with disabilities can live with dignity, and without abuse, neglect, and exploitation. NCEA is the place to turn for education, research, and promising practices in stopping abuse.**

# ELDER ABUSE

→ Hiding in Plain Sight

## WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

In general, elder abuse refers to intentional or neglectful acts by a care giver or "trusted" individual that lead to, or may lead to, harm of a vulnerable elder. In many states, younger adults with disabilities may qualify for the same services and protections. Emotional or psychological abuse; financial abuse and exploitation; neglect; physical abuse; sexual abuse; and abandonment are all considered forms of elder abuse.

In many states, self-neglect is also considered mistreatment.

# References

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