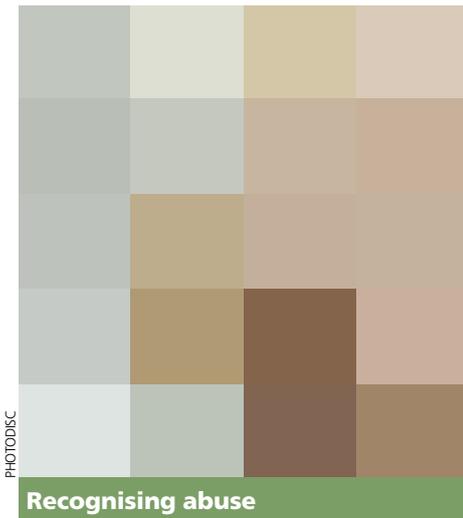


Nursing students and elder abuse: developing a learning resource



Abstract

This article describes the development of a learning resource designed to increase awareness of elder abuse among nursing students. The learning resource combines exercises, lectures, group work and the use of film. It encourages students to reflect on ways of identifying and preventing elder abuse in the increasingly wide range of settings where they are likely to work with older people.

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Key words

- Elderly: abuse
- Student nurses
- Elderly: nursing

These key words are based on the subject headings from the British Nursing Index. This article has been subject to double-blind review.

Elder abuse is a complex phenomenon encompassing a wide range of harms that impact directly on the lives of older people (McCreadie 2002). There are at least five categories of harm including physical, psychological, sexual, financial and neglect (Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) 2004). However, although the potential facets of elder abuse have been well documented (McGuinness 1997), there has been little consensus regarding a definitive definition. Neno and Neno (2005), for example, suggest that traditional definitions of elder abuse have focused on a view of older people as essentially dependent or vulnerable, thus ignoring the heterogeneity of those involved (McCreadie 2002).

This lack of consensus can be traced, at least in part, to the reluctance of some agencies to recognise the existence or scale of elder abuse (Stevenson 1993).

In acknowledging the broad scope of elder abuse and the complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships beyond those that are overtly vulnerable, AEA has suggested the following definition:

'A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relation-

ship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person' (AEA 2004).

The lack of conceptual clarity regarding a clear definition has been posited as a reason why elder abuse has remained under-reported (Erlingsson *et al* 2006). It has also been suggested that this is further compounded when ethical issues, such as notions surrounding intentional and non-intentional harm (Ekman *et al* 1991), are considered within the context of definitions of elder abuse.

Elder abuse has been described as a 'hidden problem' (Baker and Heitkemper 2005), and more than decade ago Penhale and Kingston (1995) highlighted the growing concern surrounding elder abuse as an under-recognised and under-reported phenomenon. As Neno and Neno (2005) acknowledge, there has been a paucity of research regarding the prevalence of abuse towards older people.

Although a number of studies have attempted to explore elder abuse across a range of settings, research conducted by Ogg and Bennett in 1992 remains the only community-based study of the prevalence of elder abuse in the UK (AEA 2004), high-

Box 1. Taking a stand

1. Prior to the start of the session, individual cards with the following headings are placed around the walls of the classroom:
 - Agree
 - Agree with reservations
 - Disagree
 - Disagree with reservations
 - Can't make up my mind
2. During the session the lecturer reads out a series of trigger statements
Example statement: 'What happens in a person's home is their business'
3. The students are then asked to stand under the heading that concurs with their view of the statement – for example, 'Agree'
4. Each group of students is then asked to construct an argument and give their reasons for their choice of statement
5. After each group of students has provided feedback they are invited as individuals to move to a different heading if they feel their view has changed in light of the discussion, giving reasons for the change

(Derbyshire County Council Social Service Department 2000)

lighting the potential for under-reporting of this phenomenon and its invisibility.

In addition, Richardson *et al* (2002) suggest that only recently has attention been focused on the circumstances surrounding abuse and the abuser rather than on the characteristics of the abused. Translated into the practice setting, Manthorpe (2002) echoes these sentiments, highlighting the need for practitioners to consider the context of the social situation and the risk factors surrounding potential abuse as a whole. Further, given the complexity of elder abuse, the recognition and achievement of multi-agency working among health and social care professionals is also seen as an essential requirement for practice development (Ward 2000).

The recognition of elder abuse as an issue within the policy context has also been a fairly recent event, with *No Secrets: Guidance on Developing and Implementing Multi-agency Policies and Procedures to Protect Vulnerable Adults from Abuse* (Department of Health (DH) 2000) forming the foundation for multi-agency policy development and implementation at local level. A follow-up document, *Safeguarding Adults* (Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) 2005), was published in October 2005 with the aim of consolidating and developing standards for good practice and outcomes in adult protection work. This document collated best practice and aspirations to form 11 standards of good practice to be used as an audit tool and guide for those responsible for implementing adult protection work.

However, while research into the nature and prevalence of elder abuse remains limited, it has

been posited that there are a number of mechanisms through which elder abuse may be managed effectively, including the provision of education and training (Boldy *et al* 2005, AEA 2004, McGuinness 1997). It has been suggested, for example, that the education of professionals in the recognition of cases of elder abuse is a valuable primary prevention strategy (Boldy *et al* 2005). However, although education and training have been highlighted as key facets in the effective identification and prevention of elder abuse, there remains little available evidence with regard to their composition or how they may be executed effectively in practice. Further, as Neno and Neno (2005) highlight, as yet elder abuse does not form a mandatory part of formal nurse education at either pre or post-registration level.

Comprehensive learning

With expertise and backgrounds in the care of older people, adult protection and primary care, the authors have developed a comprehensive learning resource that explores the multi-factorial nature of elder abuse. The aim of this resource is to introduce the concept of elder abuse, to increase knowledge and awareness of elder abuse as an issue, and to explore strategies for effective management and reporting in the practice setting. Crucially, students are encouraged to explore their own role and responsibilities in the reporting of suspected cases of elder abuse.

The learning resource, which is currently facilitated within the classroom, also seeks to challenge dominant cultures and perceptions surrounding older people within a broader societal context. For example, notions of ageism (Ward 2000) and the impact of organisational cultures on the experiences of care for older people are addressed both implicitly and explicitly by the learning resource.

The authors have tailored the package to meet learning needs across a range of educational programmes within the school of nursing. The resource has been adapted for different learning environments and is currently delivered across a range of modules, from BSc/diploma and undergraduate masters (MSc) to postgraduate diploma and degree-level study. The flexibility of the learning resource also enables delivery at an appropriate point within a specific programme of study. For example, undergraduate MSc students access the resource as part of a 'care of the older person' module in year three, while BSc/diploma in nursing students access the learning resource as part of their preparation for community experience at the beginning of year two, adult branch. At postgraduate level the learning resource is delivered as a half-day workshop.

In order for the facilitated session to have a significant impact on the development of knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding elder abuse,

a range of innovative teaching methods and activities has been developed by the authors to stimulate thought and discussion and to reflect different learning styles (Reece and Walker 2000, Rogers 1969). The facilitated session integrates core theoretical concepts and practice examples, and draws on locally developed materials developed for use in the practice setting (Derbyshire County Council Social Services Department 2000).

In the first instance, students are encouraged to participate in an energising, interactive exercise entitled 'taking a stand' (Derbyshire County Council Social Services Department 2000). The aim of this exercise is to explore attitudes to some of the key issues related to elder abuse and to provide a forum for discussion and debate among the student group. Box 1 provides an example of this exercise in detail.

Prior to the exercise taking place a series of cards are placed on the walls around the classroom, each bearing one of the headings listed below (see Box 1). At the start of the exercise the facilitator reads to the class a trigger statement from a selection of 12 pre-prepared statements (see Box 1). After each statement has been read out the students are asked to consider their own response, without discussion with colleagues, in line with the headings displayed on the walls of the classroom. After a short interval all the students are asked to stand by the heading – for example, 'agree' – which reflects their own individual response to the statement.

Each group of students is then asked, as a group, to consider why they have chosen a particular heading and in turn invited to provide feedback to the rest of the class regarding the rationale for their choice. Following this discussion, students are then asked by the facilitator if they would like to reconsider their first response and, if so, to move and stand by their different choice of heading. The opportunity is then provided for students to offer feedback to the group regarding changes of opinion.

This exercise provides a supportive forum that enables students to consider their own values and beliefs and to illuminate the particular tensions and challenges that arise for practitioners within the context of their daily practice. Examples of comments in terms of the key learning outcomes that have been identified by students with regard to this exercise are presented in Box 2.

A lecture with student participation is then used to clarify concepts, discuss definitions and consider the associated theories and prevalence of abuse. The development of salient policy and the current evidence base are critically discussed within the context of practice development. The particular emphasis on the principles and implementation strategy of *No Secrets* (DH 2000) enables the students to understand how elder abuse is managed within local

multi-agency settings. In light of student-identified learning needs, the mechanisms for reporting elder abuse and support systems for students in practice are also discussed within the context of professional roles and accountability.

A film extract relevant to the specific module and student group is shown and students are given trigger questions to stimulate small-group discussion of the reality of elder abuse in practice settings. A central facet of this part of the session is to develop discussion and critical analysis of the ways in which organisational and institutional cultures impact on an older person's experience of health care and the potential for elder abuse to exist (AEA 2004). Finally, students are asked to work in small groups to discuss the indicators of abuse and classify these into discrete categories.

Discussion

Student evaluations of the facilitated session to date have been very positive and have guided programme development. There has been a clear focus within the evaluations on raising recognition of the complexity of abuse with the mechanisms for formal reporting of elder abuse cited as a highly valued component overall.

However, although elder abuse as a concept has gained greater visibility within public and professional arenas in recent years, there remains a paucity of available evidence surrounding the impact of educational initiatives on the identification and effective management of elder abuse in the practice context and how educational strategies may be developed to an optimum level in the future.

The authors now plan to evaluate formally the impact of the learning resource through the development of a longitudinal study aimed at exploring student nurses' awareness and perceptions of elder abuse across the duration of the pre-registration programme.

It has been recognised that nurses have a central role to play within a multi-agency approach to identifying and preventing elder abuse in the practice setting (Baker and Heitkemper 2005). More

Box 2. Learning outcomes of 'Taking a stand' exercise identified by students

'Illuminates the multi-faceted nature of elder abuse'

'Thought provoking and facilitates shared learning'

'Illustrates the underlying ethical issues eg duty of care'

'Highlights tensions in practice eg differences between abuse and neglect'

'Provides links to earlier learning eg professional accountability'

BSc (Hons)/diploma in nursing students: care of adults in diverse community settings module (year 2 adult branch)

importantly, nurses need to be proactive in setting the agenda in terms of prevention and health education. Given the changing patterns of service and care provision for older people (DH 2001) it is crucial that nurses are adequately prepared to fulfil this key role in the prevention of elder abuse across a range of settings in the future.

Implications for practice

This article illustrates the complexities surrounding elder abuse as a phenomenon and the relatively recent initiatives designed to address this issue in practice. It also shows that although education and training are key facets in the effective identification and prevention of elder abuse, there is little available evidence with regard to the composition of education and training or how they may be executed

effectively. More importantly, elder abuse does not form a mandatory part of formal nurse education at either pre or post-registration level and this is also highlighted in the article.

Given the changing patterns of service and care provision for older people it is crucial that nurses are adequately prepared to fulfil this key role in the prevention of elder abuse across a range of settings in the future. It has also been recognised that nurses have a central role to play within a multi-agency approach to the identification and prevention of elder abuse.

Therefore, within the context of the practice setting a supportive learning environment needs to be available to enable students and qualified practitioners to consider their own values and beliefs, and the particular challenges they face within the context of their daily practice ■

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Nursing students and elder abuse

How much do you really know about identifying the signs of elder abuse?

HOW TO USE THIS ASSESSMENT

This self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) will help you to test your knowledge.

Each month you will find 12 multiple-choice questions which are broadly linked to the preceding gerontological care and practice article.

Note: There is only one correct answer for each question.

Ways to use this assessment

- You could test your subject

knowledge by attempting the questions before reading the article, and then go back over them to see if you would answer any differently.

- You might like to read the article to update yourself before attempting the questions.

The answers will be published in *Nursing Older People* next month.

- a) National roll-out
- b) In-depth interviews with participants
- c) Longitudinal study

This is self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ) number 5 and was compiled by Daniel Allen

This activity has taken me _____ minutes/hours to complete

Now that I have read this article and completed this assessment, I think my knowledge is:

- Excellent
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory
- Poor

As a result of this I intend to:

1. According to Neno and Neno (2005), traditional definitions of elder abuse are limited because older people are seen as:

- a) Lacking a voice
- b) Dependent or vulnerable
- c) Unwilling to report crime

2. The definition of elder abuse quoted in full in the article comes from:

- a) Help the Aged
- b) Age Concern
- c) Action on Elder Abuse

3. A community-based study of elder abuse in the UK was written by?

- a) Ogg and Bennett
- b) Penhale and Kingston
- c) Baker and Heitkemper

4. When assessing risk factors for elder abuse, practitioners should consider Manthorpe's argument (2002):

- a) Cognitive status of the older person
- b) Dependency levels
- c) Social context

5. What was the title of the 2000 Department of Health document on protecting vulnerable adults?

- a) *No Excuses*
- b) *No Secrets*
- c) *No Lies*

6. What was the title of the follow-up document, published by the ADSS?

- a) Safeguarding Adults
- b) Protecting Vulnerable Adults
- c) Modernising Protection Procedures

7. Which of the following is *not* listed as an aim of the learning resource?

- a) To introduce the concept of elder abuse
- b) To increase knowledge and awareness
- c) To limit elder abuse in hospital settings

8. How is the learning resource delivered at postgraduate level?

- a) As a half-day workshop
- b) As a separate module
- c) By distance learning

9. The exercise that explores attitudes towards elder abuse is:

- a) 'Stand Up and Be Counted'
- b) 'Taking a Stand'
- c) 'Stand Up Against Elder Abuse'

10. What is the final stage of the learning resource?

- a) A film extract
- b) A lecture
- c) Discussion in small groups

11 Informal evaluation of the learning resource showed a clear focus on what?

- a) The need for multi-agency responses
- b) Raised recognition of the complexity of abuse
- c) Students' belief that elder abuse was 'not their problem'

12. How do the authors propose to undertake formal evaluation?