



Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



When Aging Together Hurts; Mistreatment in Older Couples.

REFERENCE

Gravel, S., Beaulieu, M. et Lithwick, M. (1997). When Aging Together Hurts; Mistreatment in Older Couples. *Criminologie*, 30(2), 67-85.

TEXT TYPE

Format: Scientific article

Content: Empirical

DISCUSSED THEMES

Definition, forms of abuse in domestic settings, risk factors, vulnerability factors, concept of gender, profile of the abused person, authors of abuse, barriers to reporting, intervention, burden and stress.

GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This article aims to better understand the phenomenon of spousal abuse among seniors in order to develop effective intervention strategies.

PROBLEM

Although research on elder abuse have been underway since the early '80s, few studies have attempted to elucidate the issue of spousal abuse among seniors. In addition, researchers have rarely addressed the topic of abuse by someone other than the caregiver and abuse against independent seniors.

METHODOLOGY

The content of this article is based on an action research project conducted in three CLSCs (Local Community Service Centers) in Quebec (l'Estuaire, Centre-Sud and René-Cassin) that have a high proportion of elderly people among their clientele. A total of 128 cases of abuse were identified by social workers from August 1994 to August 1995. For each situation, qualitative information was collected through a questionnaire composed of open questions and through case studies provided by the practitioner. Of these, 61 represented spousal abuse among seniors. For the purposes of this analysis, couples in which both spouses are lucid were separated from couples in which a member had cognitive losses.

RESULTS

This research showed that psychological violence is the most common form of abuse by a spouse, followed by physical violence. Three factors influence the dynamics of abuse: a history of domestic violence, loss of autonomy of the spouse who abuses and of the abused spouse. It appears that spouses who inflict abuse are more likely to have a physical dependence than abused spouses. The latter are far from being all in a state of loss of autonomy or a status of physical dependence. This study highlights that caregivers can also be abused by the elderly in their care. The study also shows that lack of knowledge on the impact of cognitive impairments on the behavior of a spouse may be responsible for some forms of abuse or neglect.

DISCUSSION

The data relating to abuse by elderly spouses confirms earlier studies. However, the loss of physical autonomy does not appear as a risk factor as it did in previous research. Abuse by the senior towards his or her caregiver is an issue which had already been mentioned in the literature. Finally, although several studies reported that dependency relationships expose seniors to abuse, other studies have also found that some acts of mistreatment are perpetrated by adults with physical, emotional or financial dependence to the elder, which supports the results of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study allowed a new understanding of the problem of elder abuse. The results of this research have also led to a questioning of the validity of existing screening tools that do not allow the identification of all situations involving acts of mistreatment against seniors.

AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The author recommends a reflection on how to intervene with abused older women living in a context of domestic violence that has been going on for several years. In addition, in order to reduce the risk of abusive situations, the authors propose increasing the promotion of information programs directed to families of people with cognitive impairments, including Alzheimer's disease.

DRAFTING DATE

September 11, 2013

