



Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



The Mistreatment of Older Adults: Perpetrator-Victim Relationships and Interventions.

REFERENCE

Lithwick, M., Beaulieu, M., Gravel, S., avec la coll. de Straka, S. (1999). The Mistreatment of Older Adults: Perpetrator-Victim relationships and Interventions. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*, 11(4), 95-112.

TEXT TYPE

Format: Scientific article

Content: Empirical, theoretical

DISCUSSED THEMES

Definition, forms of mistreatment in the community, risk factors, vulnerability factors, concept of gender, profile of the abused person, authors of the abuse, consequences, barriers to reporting, detection, intervention, burden and stress, cultural aspects, theoretical model of intervention, judicial intervention.

GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This article presents the harm reduction approach as a theoretical framework for intervention in situations of mistreatment of older adults. This is accomplished on the basis of a descriptive study designed to explore both the differences and similarities in the cases of abuse against older adults, and to suggest strategies to facilitate understanding, evaluation, prevention and intervention.

PROBLEM

The literature on mistreatment of older adults focuses on definitions of the phenomenon, screening, prevalence and risk factors. Little has been written specifically address intervention in situations of mistreatment and its outcomes. In addition, although several guides and intervention protocols exist, there is currently no theoretical model of intervention that meets the needs, in terms of guidance, of all members of a multidisciplinary team.

METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a systematic analysis of 128 cases of abuse from three CLSCs (Local Community Service Centers) in Quebec (René-Cassin, Centre-Sud and L'Estuaire). Over a period of 12 months (August 1994 to August 1995), all cases of adults aged 60 years or older having made a request for services at one these CLSCs were subjected to a standardized protocol designed to detect situations presenting a high risk of abuse. To ensure the homogeneity of the process, potential situations of abuse were submitted to a project evaluator present in each CLSC. To ensure inter-rater reliability, two members of the research team reviewed, at random, 20% of these situations. Data were collected through quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

RESULTS

According to this study, in a quarter of the cases, practitioners had difficulty determining whether the intervention was necessary or not. In addition, results indicated that the type of abuse and its context vary depending on the type of author. When the husband is the author of the abuse, it most often takes the form of psychological abuse, followed by physical abuse and neglect. When it comes from an adult child, it is more often psychological abuse and financial exploitation, closely followed by neglect. When the perpetrator is an acquaintance, financial abuse is the most frequent type observed, followed by emotional abuse and neglect. As to the degree of success of the intervention, it varies, depending on the author of the abuse and the type of mistreatment.

DISCUSSION

Being able to associate types of abuse and types of authors allows practitioners to be more sensitive to risk situations, to better assess a situation and to determine more efficiently and more precisely the required services. The difficulty that is being felt by practitioners in the identification of some cases of abuse highlights the need to establish a clear definition of the phenomenon. Zero tolerance seems to be an unrealistic goal in the case of mistreatment against seniors. Rather than aiming to eradicate mistreatment completely, it is more realistic to aim to reduce its adverse effects to an acceptable level for the victim. The harm reduction approach is based on neutrality about values and puts forward programs focused on the customer and his or her choices.

CONCLUSION

The harm reduction approach seems well suited to the complexity of the intervention in situations of abuse. The structure of this approach proposes general instructions and principles to guide intervention. It is well adapted to the reality of health care and social services professionals, however, it is however not suitable for other types of professionals, such as police officers. The principles of this approach are all focused on the well being and needs of the elderly, on respect towards them, and are consistent with the values of home and community care.

AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The harm reduction approach is useful for intervention, and also allows the conceptualization of future research aimed at identifying solutions and at providing a better understanding of intervention and its outcomes.

DRAFTING DATE

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