



## Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



### Ethics and the Exercise of Professional Autonomy of Psychosocial Workers Intervening with Mistreated Older Adults.

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#### REFERENCE

Beaulieu, M. & Giasson, M. (2005).  
Ethics and the Exercise of Professional  
Autonomy of Psychosocial Workers  
intervening with Mistreated Older  
Adults. *Nouvelles Pratiques Sociales*,  
18(1), 131-147.

#### TEXT TYPE

**Format:** Scientific article

**Content:** Reflection

#### DISCUSSED THEMES

Definition, magnitude of the  
phenomenon, forms of mistreatment,  
laws, prevention, screening,  
intervention, organization of services,  
training, public policy, ethical issues,  
professional identity and autonomy,  
exercise of power.

#### GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This article presents a critical reflection on the comments made by practitioners  
on their professional autonomy in relation to the issue of elder abuse.

#### PROBLEM

In Canada, data suggests that 4 to 7% of community-dwelling seniors are  
abused. Psychosocial workers are important players in prevention, detection  
and intervention in situations of abuse. They are sometimes faced with ethical  
issues in their practice. In Quebec, there is no policy pertaining to intervention  
with older adults who are experiencing abuse nor is there legislation specific to  
the protection of seniors. In addition, practices are influenced by changes in the  
health and social services system, which include restructuring and budget cuts. It  
also appears that many problems are caused by the interference of organizations  
in the professional autonomy of practitioners.

#### METHODOLOGY

This article presents the results of a qualitative, fundamental and exploratory  
research process supported by a transversal device. The study was conducted  
with the participation of sixteen practitioners recruited through the snowball  
sampling method (eight in the Bas-Saint-Laurent and eight in the Quebec  
City region, from both community organizations and the public sector).  
Semi-structured interviews held in a non-directive manner, with open-ended  
questions, were used to address several issues related to practice and to  
various psychosocial and ethical issues that are encountered by practitioners.  
The analysis is particularly focused on representations of positive and negative  
factors influencing the exercise of professional autonomy, from the point of  
view of the participants.

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## RESULTS

The comments of practitioners focus on the negative aspects related to their professional autonomy. They criticize the organization of services (including the absence of preventive interventions) and the many pressures from both the organization and society. Practitioners may have difficulty dealing with the gray areas in intervention and to adapt to the structure of service delivery in the organization. Changes in the practitioners themselves, to the organization and in society could promote the exercise of professional autonomy.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion is integrated in the Results section above.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that in the exercise of professional autonomy, practitioners both identify themselves to and take from the organization, their profession and their professional values. However, they mention a certain inherent discomfort in the exercise of their professional autonomy. They also denounced the organizational constraints.

## AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

In order to reduce the burden on practitioners, it is important to consider ethical reflection, clinical supervision, training, support from the interdisciplinary team and managers, working in partnership, awareness and additional resources. In addition, it is imperative to further the reflection on the role, mandate, professional identity and exercise of autonomy of psychosocial workers, taking into account the socio-political context. It is also recommended to add resources and adopt a long-term vision in order to counter the elder abuse.

## DRAFTING DATE

May 15, 2014

