



## Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



### Ethical and Psychosocial Issues Raised by the Practice in Cases of Mistreatment of Older Adults.

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#### REFERENCE

Beaulieu, M., & Leclerc, N. (2006). Ethical and Psychosocial Issues Raised by the Practice in Cases of Mistreatment of Older Adults. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 46(3/4), 161-186.

#### TEXT TYPE

**Format:** Scientific article

**Content:** Reflection

#### DISCUSSED THEMES

Definition, extent of the phenomenon forms of abuse at home, laws, detection, intervention, ethics, training, values.

#### GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study is to identify the problems and ethical dilemmas faced by practitioners in their practice with older adults who are experiencing abuse.

#### PROBLEM

Elder abuse has been recognized as a social problem in the early 1980s in Quebec. It affects about 4-7% of seniors living at home. Various professionals, both in the psychosocial and medical field, are key players in the detection of elder abuse. Often left to themselves and without proper tools, they must deal with their own values, beliefs and biases.

#### METHODOLOGY

In total, sixteen psychosocial workers, equally divided between the public sector and the community sector, were recruited in two regions of Quebec. All participants had to have worked five years in the field and have significant experience with seniors who are experiencing abuse. The snowball sampling method was used. Participants were asked to describe their experience in connection with situations of abuse through a semi-structured interview. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed according N'Vivo, based on a mixed approach combining inductive and thematic analysis.

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## RESULTS

The results show the existence of an intervention continuum ranging from negative autonomy (the practitioner withdraws following the refusal by the client) to extreme measures, with assistance in the center. Three variables influence the choice of intervention: the loss of autonomy of the senior, the dangerousness of the situation and collaboration between the different players (victim, perpetrator of abuse and practitioners). In order of importance, the values promoted in interventions are those of respect for autonomy, beneficence (or doing no harm) and justice. Negative autonomy raises many questions because the senior is left on his or her own. Assistance, meanwhile, involves acceptance and tolerance of situations involving a risk for the senior. Extreme measures imply the necessity to face many pressures and manage negative feelings, in addition to being confronted to one's own professional autonomy.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion is integrated to the Results section presented above.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, several ethical and psychosocial questions are related to intervention with seniors who abused. The present study is the first to present a continuum of intervention based on values inherent in the practice of intervention, namely respect for autonomy and beneficence (or non-maleficence). In addition, the authors believe that justice should take a greater place when working with this clientele.

## AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The authors suggest conducting further research on the issues inherent to other areas of practice or other professionals who work with abused seniors, as well as on the influence on practices of protocols for screening or intervention. They also suggest carrying out a study over several months to better identify and understand the problems faced by each of the players involved in an abusive situation. Concerning practice, they suggest providing training and support to practitioners working directly or indirectly with these clients, to train future professionals to intervene in the gray areas and to bring agencies to introduce ethics in the context of case discussions.

## DRAFTING DATE

May 28, 2014

