

Chapter 7

Elder Abuse in Communities of Color in the United States: A Literature Review



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Introduction

Elder abuse is a significant major problem in today's society, and it affects older adults across all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and globally. Using evidence from 52 studies in 28 countries from different regions, including 12 low- and middle-income countries, World Health Organization (2017) reports that globally one in six elderly people experiences some form of abuse. This new study has found that 17% of people above 60 years old are subjected to psychological abuse, financial abuse (6.8%), neglect (4.2%), physical abuse (2.6%), and sexual abuse (0.9%).

In the United States, a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study with a representative sample of more than 7000 community-residing elders found that approximately one in ten elders reported experiencing at least one form of elder mistreatment in the year prior to the study. The researcher also indicated that approximately 1 out of every 14 cases of elderly takes place in the victim's home (Laws.com, 2017). Other research shows that elder abuse may be twice as common, in the United States, as previously thought (Anetzberger, 2012).

Lachs and Pillemer (2015) reviewed research and clinical evidence in the United States on the extent, assessment, and management of elder abuse. They found that the prevalence of elder abuse was approximately 10% including physical abuse, psychological or verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, and neglect. However, the author argued that this prevalence was underestimated. Their findings are consistent with other research (see Beach, Schulz, Castle, & Rosen, 2010; Acierno et al., 2010).

Despite the fact that research on elder abuse has grown significantly since the 1980s, there are gaps in the perceptions, conceptualizations, nature, and extent of

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elder abuse because most of the research often focus on White, middle-class individuals (Moon & Benton, 2000), while the issues of ethnicity and race and the experiences of immigration, discrimination, and social class are largely ignored. In other words, there is very limited research that studied communities of color. The primary objective of this study is to explore the nature, extent, and responses to elder abuse within communities of color, primarily Native American, African-American, Asian-American, and Latino communities. Recommendations for research and practice are included.

Definitions and Perceptions of Elder Abuse

There appears to be no universally accepted legal or social definition of elder abuse. In the United States, each state has its own laws so the legal definition as to what constitutes elder abuse varies from state to state. In addition, definitions of elder abuse can vary between the official and the profession definitions. Moreover, the perceptions as to what elder abuse is vary among and within different social groups. The age and gender of the abuser, the health of the older person, the characteristics of the alleged victim, cultural beliefs, and values may determine how elder abuse is defined and perceived. Definitions of elder abuse among people of color are determined by the cultural differences between the different racial and ethnic groups and within these groups.

Elder abuse, however, can be defined as the intentional infliction of harm on an older adult. It can also take the form of intentional or unintentional neglect of an older adult by the caregiver. There are six common categories. They are *physical abuse* which can range from slapping or shoving to severe beatings and restraining with ropes or chains; *verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse* which ranges from name-calling or giving the “silent treatment” to intimidating and threatening the individual; *sexual abuse* which can range from sexual exhibition to rape; *financial abuse and exploitation* which constitute misuse of an older person’s funds to embezzlement; and *caregiver neglect* which includes failure to provide food, water, clothing, medications, and assistance with activities of daily living or help with personal hygiene (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Perceptions of Elder Abuse in Communities of Color

Diversity in cultural values determines the definitions and perceptions of elder abuse. Consequently, when one defines elder abuse among communities of color, it is imperative to understand the differences in perceptions of elder abuse, from a sociocultural perspective, among the various ethnic and racial groups (Lee, Kaplan, & Perez-Stable, 2014).

Early research in the United States found that African-Americans compared to Caucasians, Puerto Rican Americans, and Japanese Americans were more likely to identify financial exploitation as a form of elder abuse (Anetzberger, Korbin, & Tomita, 1996). Other research found that African-Americans and Caucasians had similar views as to the causes of elder abuse, but Korean Americans were more tolerant of elder abuse than the other two groups. Another study found that the definitions of elder abuse were consistent among African-American, Caucasian, and Mexican American elders (Moulton et al., 2005).

Enguidanos and Associates (2014, p. 877) conducted five focus groups with African-Americans, English-speaking Latinos, Spanish-speaking Latinos, non-Latino Whites, and African-American caregivers of older adults to determine their definitions and perceptions of elder abuse. They found that different racial and ethnic groups expressed similar definitions and meanings of elder abuse. However, Latinos identified additional themes of “machismo, respect, love, and early intervention to stop abuse suggesting that perceptions/beliefs about elder mistreatment are determined by culture and degree of acculturation in addition to race/ethnicity.” The authors also found that there were different perceptions of elder abuse among members of the different racial and ethnic Latino groups in their sample.

Studies have also shown that the Native American’s conceptions of elder abuse are culturally determined. Some Native Americans, for example, apply the term “spiritual abuse” to situations in which the elders are being denied access to ceremonies or traditional healing (Trelstad, 2017). The Shielding American Indian Elders (SAIE) project examined the cultural understandings of elder mistreatment among 100 urban and rural American Indians ages 60 and older from a Northern Plains reservation and a South Central metropolitan area. The project focused on the respondents’ perception of what it meant to be treated well and poorly by family. The respondents reported that good treatment included “being taken care of, having one’s needs met, and being respected. Poor treatment, on the other hand, was defined as financial exploitation, neglect, and lack of respect” (Jervis, 2014, p. 78).

Lee, Kaplan, and Perez-Stable (2014), studying Korean and Chinese immigrants, reported that culture, immigration, and acculturation influenced their subjective perceptions of and response to elder abuse. Moon (2000) reported that Asian elders define elder abuse as taking place only in the family and, therefore, will not view abuse of an elderly person by strangers as elder abuse. In addition, he noted that Asian-Pacific Islander (API) elders perceived psychological abuse to be the worst form of abuse or as harmful as physical abuse.

Extent and Nature of Elder Abuse Among Communities of Color

Despite the fact that elder abuse has been a serious societal problem, it has been an “invisible” phenomenon, which has been hidden within the family and institutions. Consequently, the nature and extent of the problem are difficult to be determined.

This is particularly true in communities of color where cultural values, beliefs, and traditions significantly affect the way in which elder abuse is defined, perceived, and reported. There is, therefore, limited research on communities of color and elder abuse.

Native Americans

National statistics indicate the elderly population is expected to increase to an estimated 72.1 million persons, from 7% to 15% by the year 2030 (Barton, 2012). As the number of Native American elders increases in the next 50 years (including those living on reservations), elder abuse will likely increase, as well (Smyer & Clark, 2011).

There was a common belief that elder abuse was not a problem for Native peoples. This was based on the premise that the elders in the Native American communities were respected, honored, and revered. They were considered the cornerstones of the family and viewed as repositories of knowledge and wisdom for their community. They held power among their tribes and serve as important links to the past (White, 2004; Baker-Demaray, 2014; Elder Abuse Task Force, 2008; Hall & Weis, 2007; Jackson & Sappier, 2005; Jervis, Boland, & Fickenscher, 2010; Smyer & Clark, 2011). According to Jackson and Sappier (2005):

The traditional status of elders in American Indian and Alaska Native cultures is one of honor and respect. Elders are respected for their age, experience, maturity, and wisdom. They are considered valuable resources to the Tribe as custodians of Tribal history, culture and tradition. (p. 1)

Unfortunately, it is now widely accepted that elder abuse is presently a problem in the Native American communities and most of the perpetrators are family members (Anetzberger, 1997; Baldrige & Brown, 2000; Baldrige, 2001; Barton, 2012; Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2013; Smyer & Clark, 2011). Furthermore, abuse of the elder is a clandestine and an increasing problem in the Native American community. Historically elder abuse was unheard of in the Native American community, but recently, there has been an increase in elder abuse (Trelstad, 2017). This change in the Native American community is referred to as a cultural paradox because in the Native American community, there is a long history of respect for elders and elder abuse has now become a serious problem in that community (Smyer & Clark, 2011).

The first empirical study of abuse and neglect against Native American elders explored the extent, types, severity, and causes of abuse against Navajo seniors in the traditional rural community (Brown, 1989). Brown (1989) found that 16% reported being physically abused, 32% neglected, and 22% financially exploited and studied two tribes in the Plains region and found that neglect was the most prevalent form of abuse. Research suggests that 10% of American Indian elders suffer from definite or probable physical mistreatment (Anisko, 2009). Jervis et al. (2014)

surveyed 100 from Native Americans and found that financial exploitation was a major issue.

Carson (1995) linked the risk factors of elder abuse to the changes in kinship patterns of the Native Americans over the past 150 years. He argued that Native Americans have been subjected to a number of policies that have caused “oppression and genocide, broken treaties, economic hardship, forced migration to reservation land bases, detribalization, and the removal of large numbers of Indian children from their parents and tribe” (p. 21). Several members of the Native American community also view the increase in elder abuse among Native American populations resulting from the rejection of traditional tribal values and beliefs. Substance abuse and culture loss are also blamed for much of the elder mistreatment occurring in contemporary Native communities (Jervis et al., 2017). Other issues that often contribute to elder abuse in Native American communities include high unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and high rates of substance abuse (Department of Health, and Human Services, Centers for Medicare, and Medicaid Services, 2015).

African-Americans

The Administration on Aging reported that the Black or African-American older population was 3.2 million in 2008 and is projected to grow to over 9.9 million by 2050, and this is projected to be 18.5% of the older population in the United States (Vincent & Velkoff, 2011).

According to Tauriac and Scruggs (2006), elder abuse in the African-American community is defined and shaped by the sociohistorical experiences of slavery. They reported that physical aggression was the most common abuse in the African-American community, followed by verbal aggression. In 2010, Beach et al. (2010) conducted a population-based study on financial exploitation and psychological mistreatment among 210 African-American and 693 non-African-American adults aged 60 years and older in Pennsylvania. Their results indicated that financial exploitation disproportionately affected African-American older adults in comparison to non-African-Americans. They found that 2% of non-Black seniors compared with 13% of the Black seniors reported being cheated out of money in the 6 months prior to the study. The study also found that family members, other than the spouses, were the source of screaming (psychological abuse). In general, African-Americans seemed to be disproportionately impacted by financial exploitation and psychological mistreatment (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2016).

Research has shown that older African-American living with others rather than living alone (Lachs et al., 1997; Aubrey, 2002), poverty (Williams, 1990; Griffin & Williams, 1992; Li & Fries, 2005; Tauriac & Scruggs, 2006), and health disparities (Dancy Jr. & Ralston, 2002; Johnson, Gibson, & Luckey, 1990) are risk factors for abuse within the African-American communities. Studies have also shown that African-American elders, whose caregiver suffers from a great deal of stress and emotional and mental health problems and is exposed to intergenerational transmission of violence, are at risk for abuse (Benton, 1999; Spencer, 1995).

Asian-American and Pacific Islander Communities

Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the United States are a diverse group of people who include Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Thai, Hmong, Hawaiian, and other distinct ethnic groups. It is one of the most heterogeneous groups, with 50 different races and ethnicities, and is the fastest-growing minority group in the United States. They make up 5.4%, but this number is projected to increase to 9.3% by 2050 (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

Since the 1980s, several studies on elder abuse in the Asian communities were conducted in the United States. These studies show that the prevalence of elder abuse in the Asian communities ranged from 1% to 10% (see Laumann, Leitsch, & Waite, 2008; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988; Tatara & Kuzmeskus, 1997). More recently, Chun (2017) reported that financial exploitation is a serious problem in the Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) older members of that community. Choi, Lee, and Koh (2014) examined experiences of elder mistreatment among Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) older adults. The results indicated that 40% of research participants experienced at least one type of mistreatment during the past 12 months. The most experienced mistreatment was emotional mistreatment (26.7%), followed by financial (17.3%), physical (1.7%), and sexual (1.7%) (p. 5).

Some of the research on Asian-American have highlighted the cultural variations of elder abuse among the different Asian groups. Lee et al. (2014) for example, conducted a study with Koreans and Chinese immigrants and found that the most frequently type of elder maltreatment among the respondents was psychological or emotional abuse. Verbal aggressive acts, which included episodes of yelling, name-calling, belittling verbal threats, or hostile remarks, were included in their concept of psychological abuse. The respondents also reported nonverbal aggression which included exclusion, isolation, intimidation, control, domination, or restriction of freedom as an element of psychological or emotional abuse (Lee, Kaplan, & Perez-Stable, 2014). Dong (2014) found that elder maltreatment in the Chinese community in the greater Chicago area varied from 13.9 to 25.8%. The researcher found that financial exploitation was the most common form of maltreatment, followed by psychological abuse, caregiver neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Using a community-based participatory research approach, Dong et al. (2011), in their study of Chinese elders, identified psychological mistreatment was the most serious form of mistreatment. The respondents also characterized elder mistreatment in terms of caregiver neglect.

Latino Americans

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) uses the term “Latino or Hispanic” to refer to persons of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. As of July 2016, they constitute the largest ethnic

minority and account for about 18% of the total US population (Colby and Ortman, 2015). Hispanic Americans are the second fastest-growing ethnic or racial group by percentage growth in the United States after Asian-Americans. Hispanic/Latinos overall are the second largest ethnic group in the United States after non-Hispanic Whites.

Like the other people of color, there is limited research on Latinos and elder abuse. However, DeLiema, Gassoumis, Homeier, and Wilber (2012) studied 198 Latino elders and found that 40% experienced at least one type of abuse and 21% experienced multiple types. Among those who had experienced mistreatment, about 25% reported psychological abuse, 10.7% reported physical abuse, 9% reported sexual abuse, 16.7% reported financial exploitation, and 11.7% reported caregiver neglect. Of the older adults that were abused, only 1.5% reported the abuse to Adult Protective Services.

Laumann et al. (2008) conducted a study with a representative sample of Latino older adults and found they were verbally and financially abused but they were less likely to report it. Moon (2000) noted that Latinos, like Asian-Americans, define elder abuse among within the context of the family, so they did not recognize abuse of the elder by someone outside of the family as elder abuse.

Reporting the Elder Abuse

Research has shown that most victims of elder abuse in community of color do not report the abuse. There are several reasons for this response.

Cultural Values and Beliefs That Inhibit Disclosure

Certain cultural values, beliefs, and traditions influence whether or not certain minority groups will seek assistance if they are abused. According to DeLiema et al. (2012), most immigrants are reluctant to report the abuse because of the family's preference to resolve it on its own. Some minority groups have a strong sense of family preservation. Consequently, they feel obligated to keep family problems within the home (Lee, 1997).

API victims of elder abuse may not want to reveal the abuse to outsiders because it is a source of shame. So, they may suffer in silence in order to keep it within the family (Moon, 2000). Chinese and Korean immigrants, for example, tend to have a strong reluctance to reveal elder abuse because, culturally, they are against the public disclosure of family issues and seeking assistance outside the family (Lee et al. 2014). According to Lee et al. (2014, pp. 13–14):

There are Asian sayings that you keep your problems within your own family. They don't believe somebody else outside of their family can help their problems. So, Chinese and Korean thinking are different from Western thinking. They don't want to talk about it,

they don't want to expose it, and the only time when elder abuse surfaces is when it reaches a crisis.

In traditional Asian cultures, such as those of China, Japan, and Korea, "loss of face" means disgrace and loss of respect not only for the individual but also the immediate family and the entire ancestral lineage. This is based on the collectivistic orientation which emphasizes the family and the community rather than the individual. Therefore, Asian elder abused victims may be reluctant to disclose the abuse for fear of shaming their families and communities. Haukioja (2016) reported that her respondents explained that the cultural stigma of disclosing the abuse was an important reason for not disclosing it. They did not want to bring shame on the family, especially since the family is central to the elderly person's identity. The fear of "losing face" often deters many Asian victims from reporting of elder abuse (Dong et al. 2011).

Members of the African-American community may be reluctant to report the abuse because culturally they were taught to "don't tell their business" or avoid disclosure. There is also a strong sense of loyalty to both the immediate and extended family so they are reluctant to discuss "private matters" outside of the family. There is also loyalty to the race and community. So the African-American elders may feel a need to maintain family privacy. Moreover, African-American elders often prefer to utilize informal support networks or institutions that have a strong community acceptance by credible members of their community (Horsford, Parra-Cardona, Post, & Schiamberg, 2011). Consequently, because of the culture of silence that exists within the African-American community, elderly victims may be reluctant to report their abuse to outsider and may not receive the needed care.

Culture factors are also important to Latinos. Several cultural values could act inhibiting factors to the disclosure of elder abuse in the Latino community. *La familia* within the Latin community places special emphasis on loyalty to the family and is more important than the individual in many Latino cultures. Preserving *la familia* to avoid *vergüenza*, or shame, can result in the lack of reporting elder abuse. Latinos who are committed to *la familia* and are abused may refuse to disclose abuse. Also, in these communities, if someone breaks this privacy code, that person is considered a traitor to the family and may be punished. Consequently, fear of rejection from family, friends, and community may prevent elderly victims from reporting their abuse. Citizenship status may also be a barrier to reporting elder abuse. If the victim is undocumented, that person is less likely to report the abuse for fear of deportation of themselves or their family members (DeLiema et al. 2012).

Language Barriers

One major cultural barrier to reporting the elder abuse is the lack of language proficiency. An inability to speak English may prevent from reporting the abuse. According to Haukioja (2016), in her study, language barriers created difficulties for older respondents Chinese and South Asians to discuss their abuse outside of their communities. The inability to discuss in the dominant language was an inhibiting factor

for elderly to report the abuse. Lack of English proficiency is considered a risk factor for foreign-born Latinos but also a hindrance to seeking help when facing abuse or having been abused (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2014).

Distrust of the System

Many members of the community of color do not trust societal systems so they are reluctant to report the elder abuse. There is also the fear that the involvement of authorities could harm the victim and the family (DeLiema et al., 2012). Some minority groups, for example, especially those that have negative experiences with the criminal justice system, believe that reporting the abusers may lead to incarceration (Enguidanos, Deliema, Aguilar, Lambrinos, & Wilber, 2014). This is particularly true of African-American elders who may be reluctant to report the abuse and seek assistance of the police given their experiences of systematic racism, discrimination, police abuse, and segregation (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2016). Some Latino and Asian elders also may be concerned that they will not be treated with respect by professionals (Blanchard & Lurie, 2004; Herrera et al., 2008).

Lack of Culturally Sensitive Services

There is a tendency for people of color to underutilize community services because some of these services are not culturally appropriate for people from specific racial, cultural, and linguistically diverse communities. They often do not focus on the unique needs of elderly people of color who have been abused. Research has shown that in API family, intervention may be rejected if it is not delivered in a culturally sensitive manner (Brownell, 1998). In the Latino community, lack of cultural competency can create barriers to service for elderly victims. Choi et al. (2014) found that 68% of their respondents turned to their family for assistance during their maltreatment. In addition, lack of awareness of services can also prevent the victims from acquiring treatment (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2005). Choi et al. (2014) found that 70% of their respondents were not aware of the Adult Protective Services in their community.

Recommendations

Gaps in Research

There are limited studies that have been conducted on elder abuse with people of color. The few studies that do exist contain very small sample sizes so that the prevalence rates of elder abuse in these communities are underestimated. More studies, with

representative samples, are, therefore, needed. Future studies should focus on the prevalence, incidence, causes, risk/protective factors, and consequences of elder abuse in these communities.

There is also the need for community-based participatory research (CBPR) which will entail joint partnership between academic institutions with community organizations and key stakeholders. The CBPR approach is an important model for exploring the issues of elder abuse in minority communities. It allows the collaboration of researchers, community leaders, stakeholders, and member of the community to engage in research (Dong, Chang, Wong, & Simon, 2013). The results of traditional and community-based studies can be used to formulate policies and programs for victims of elder abuse. "CBPR methodology could be a novel model for conducting systematic and culturally appropriate elder abuse research in minority populations" (para. 5) (Dong, 2012).

Culturally Appropriate and Sensitive Practice and Interventions

Given the increasing number of abuse older adults in communities of color, it is imperative that state and local communities develop and implement effective culturally appropriate prevention and management interventions to address the needs of these populations. It is also important for practitioners to understand the intersection between race, culture, and elder abuse. Culturally appropriate education and training is very important (Dong, 2012).

Culturally appropriate practice and interventions should be multicultural, multi-level, and multifaceted, especially in communities with collective cultures, such as Asian-Americans (Bernado, 2014). These programs should be designed to "increase familial, social, and community support for vulnerable older adults" (Dong et al., 2013, p. 8). In practice, these programs should also be interdisciplinary with an emphasis on a holistic view for understanding the individual, family, community, and the system and the social inequalities and injustices that exist in the elder abuse victim's life. Additionally, in practice, practitioners should use an intersectional approach by examining various forms of oppression, discrimination, and domination through the diversity lens of race and ethnicity, immigration status, religion, language barriers, and social class. In addition, competent older members of these communities can play a vital role in designing these culturally appropriate programs.

Prevention

Elder abuse is a major public health issue. With the increase in elderly population in communities of color, elder abuse in these communities is likely to increase. However, there is a paucity of information about elder abuse in these communities.

Racial and ethnic forms of elder abuse are underexplored. Improvement in the knowledge gap is the key to effective prevention and treatment of the elder victims in these communities. In addition, there needs to be increased awareness of elder abuse, through public information campaign and educational programs and among members of these communities. There is also the need for access to competent and culturally appropriate services in these communities.

Preventing elder abuse in the communities of color necessitates an understanding of the factors that predispose the elder members of these communities to abuse. Understanding which factors are related to elder abuse is essential in prevention of this phenomenon. It is, therefore, imperative for researchers to examine the risk factors of elder abuse which are a combination of individual, relational, community, and societal factors that contribute to the risk of becoming a perpetrator of elder abuse. It is also important to examine the protective factors, which are factors associated with a lower likelihood that elder abuse will take place. Protective factors have not been studied as extensively or rigorously as risk factors. However, both the risk and protective factors are equally as important in preventing elder abuse. Prevention strategies should, therefore, attempt to eliminate risk factors while strengthening the protective factors against elder abuse.

Summary

This review examined the limited information on elder abuse in the Native American, Asian-American, African-American, and Latino communities in the United States. There is a disparity in the literature which tends to focus on White Americans so research on elder abuse communities of color is very limited. Most of the research examined elder abuse in the home, and very few focus on institutions.

The review revealed that there are different definitional variations of elder abuse among the various racial and ethnic groups. It also indicated that the nature and extent of the elder abuse vary among the communities of color. Within all the groups, family plays an important role, and strong family solidarity, privacy, and filial piety are factors that determine whether or not the abuse will be reported. It is clear from the literature that most of the victims in these communities do not report their abuse. Furthermore, the review of the literature suggests that although there is some awareness of the elder abuse, this varies among the community of color. A common theme in the literature is that there are not enough culturally appropriate intervention programs.

In conclusion, this review highlights the need to increase awareness and research of elder abuse in communities of color. There is also the need for culturally interventions and programs to tackle the problem of elder abuse in communities of color. This phenomenon cannot be prevented until there is a greater understanding of the etiology of elder abuse in these and its impact on these communities.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss three reasons for elder abuse in the Native American communities.
2. Regarding elder abuse in the Native American community, what is the meaning of cultural paradox?
3. What are three differences in the perceptions of elder abuse among the four groups?
4. Discuss three reasons why members of the community of color do not report their victimization.
5. Discuss three recommendations in the chapter on how to improve the gaps in the information on elder abuse in community of color.
6. Discuss two ways in which to prevent elder abuse in communities of color.

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