

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

1201 15th Street, NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC 20005-2800

Elder Abuse Information Series No. 2

Trends in Elder Abuse in Domestic Settings¹

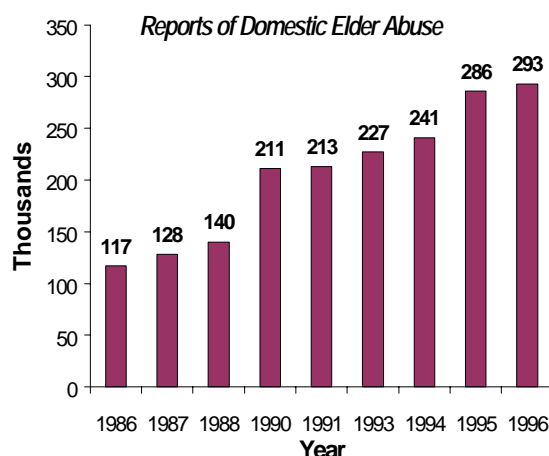
The Problem of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse in domestic settings is a serious problem, affecting hundreds of thousands of elderly people across the country. However, because it is still largely hidden under the shroud of family secrecy, elder abuse is grossly under-reported. Some experts estimate that only 1 out of 14 domestic elder abuse incidents (*excluding* the incidents of self-neglect) comes to the attention of authorities². Although it is impossible to know precisely how many cases go unreported, experts suggest that domestic elder abuse cases reported to State adult protective service or aging agencies represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Trends in Domestic Elder Abuse

The National Center on Elder Abuse has been collecting data on the reports of domestic elder abuse since 1986. The data on the trends in domestic elder abuse discussed next are based on the results of

surveys of State adult protective service agencies and State units on aging and represent national summaries unless otherwise indicated.



Total reports. From 1986 to 1996 there was a steady increase in the reporting of domestic elder abuse nationwide: 117,000 reports in 1986; 128,000 reports in 1987; 140,000 reports in 1988; 211,000 reports in 1990; 213,000 reports in 1991; 227,000 reports in 1993;

¹This Informational report was researched and written by Toshio Tataru, Ph.D. and Lisa M. Kuzmeskus, M.A. for the National Center on Elder Abuse Grant No. 90-am-0660 (Washington, DC: May 1996) and updated November 1997 by Edward Duckhorn.

²Karl Pillemer and David Finkelhor (1988), "The Prevalence of Elder Abuse: A Random Sample Survey," *The Gerontologist*, 28: 51-57.

The National Center on Elder Abuse is a partnership of the National Association of State Units on Aging (NASUA); the Commission on Legal Problems of the Elderly of the American Bar Association (ABA); the Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly (CANE) of the University of Delaware; the San Francisco Consortium for Elder Abuse Prevention of the Goldman Institute on Aging (GIOA); the National Association of Adult Protective Services Administrators (NAAPSA); and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA). Support for the National Center on Elder Abuse is provided by the U.S. Administration on Aging.

241,000 reports in 1994; 286,000 reports in 1995; and 293,000 reports in 1996. The 1996 figure represents a 150% increase in reports since 1986.

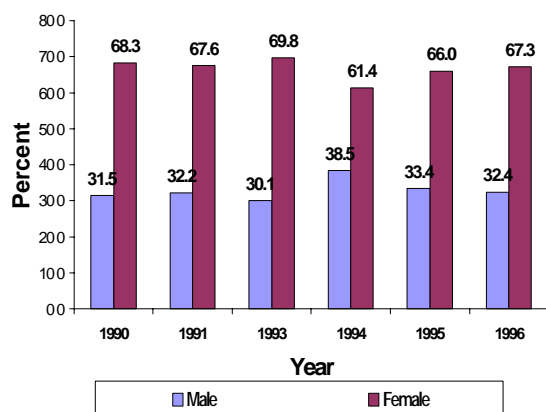
- **Types of abuse.** Neglect is the most common form of elder maltreatment and increased dramatically over the last six years for which we have data: from 47.0 percent of reported cases in 1990 to 55.0 percent in 1996. In 1990, reports of physical abuse accounted for 20.2 percent of all reports, but gradually, these reports declined to 14.6 percent of all reports in 1996.

Reports of exploitation and emotional abuse also declined over the 1990-1996 period in their percents of the total reports—from 17.3 percent in 1990 to 12.3 percent in 1996 for *exploitation*, and from 11.7 percent in 1990 to 7.7 percent in 1996 for *emotional abuse*. Reports of *sexual abuse* remained constant over the six year period at approximately 0.3 percent of the total reports.

- **Sex of victims.** The majority of elder abuse victims are female. However, over the last six years for which we have data, the gender gap narrowed some. In 1990, 68.3 percent of all reports involved female victims. In 1996, the incidence was 67.3 percent.

- **Sex of perpetrators.** In 1990, the majority of perpetrators were male: 54.7 percent male and 42.1 percent female. But by 1996 the ratio of male perpetrators to female perpetrators changed to a degree where there was no significant difference between the two sexes:

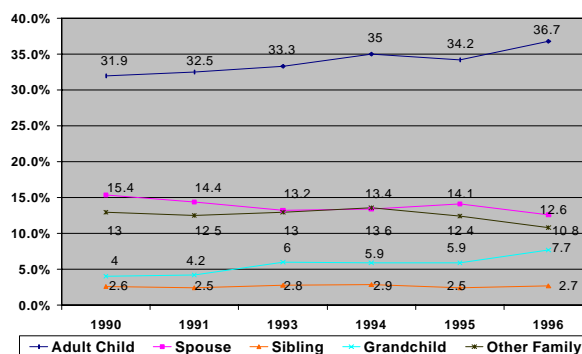
Sex of Victims of Domestic Elder Abuse



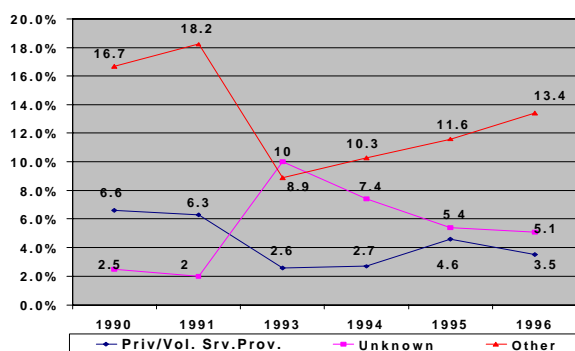
47.4 percent male and 48.9 percent female.

- **Relationship of perpetrator to victim.** Adult children are the most frequent abusers of the elderly, and this category experienced the biggest increase in its composition of the total reports: 30.1 percent in 1990 to 36.7 percent in 1996. Other family members and spouses ranked as the next most likely abusers of the elderly. Other family members comprised 16.1 percent of all reports in 1990 and 10.8 percent of all reports in 1996, while spouses comprised 15.9 percent of all reports in 1990 and 12.6 percent in 1996.

Family Members as Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse



Other Perpetrators of Domestic Elder Abuse



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