



# SUSPECTING ELDER ABUSE: NOW WHAT?

PRESENTED BY LINDA KIRPES, MSW  
COVENANT VILLAGE OF THE GREAT LAKES

7<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ART & SCIENCE OF AGING CONFERENCE  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY  
FEBRUARY 10, 2012



# WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

- **Definition:** The willful infliction of injury; unreasonable confinement; intimidation; punishment with resulting physical harm, pain or mental anguish; or deprivation by an individual, including a caretaker, of goods or services that are necessary to attain or maintain physical, mental and psychosocial well-being.



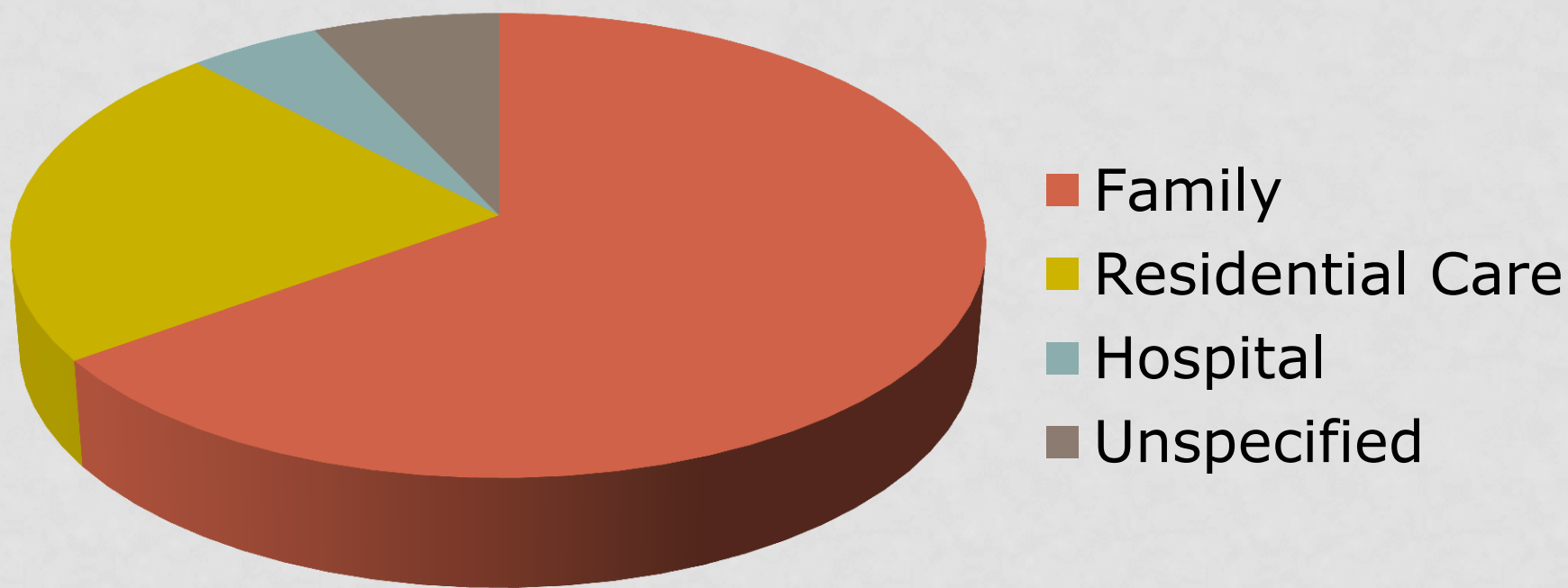
# WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

- Every five seconds, an elderly person is abused
- Nearly 6 million cases of elder abuse every year
- Individuals who are:
  - Over age 80
  - Need more physical assistance
  - Have compromised cognitive functioning
- Women are more likely than men (70%)
- Abuse does not discriminate! Victims represent all races, economic levels, and health status

**The Drivers: Entitlement, power, and control**

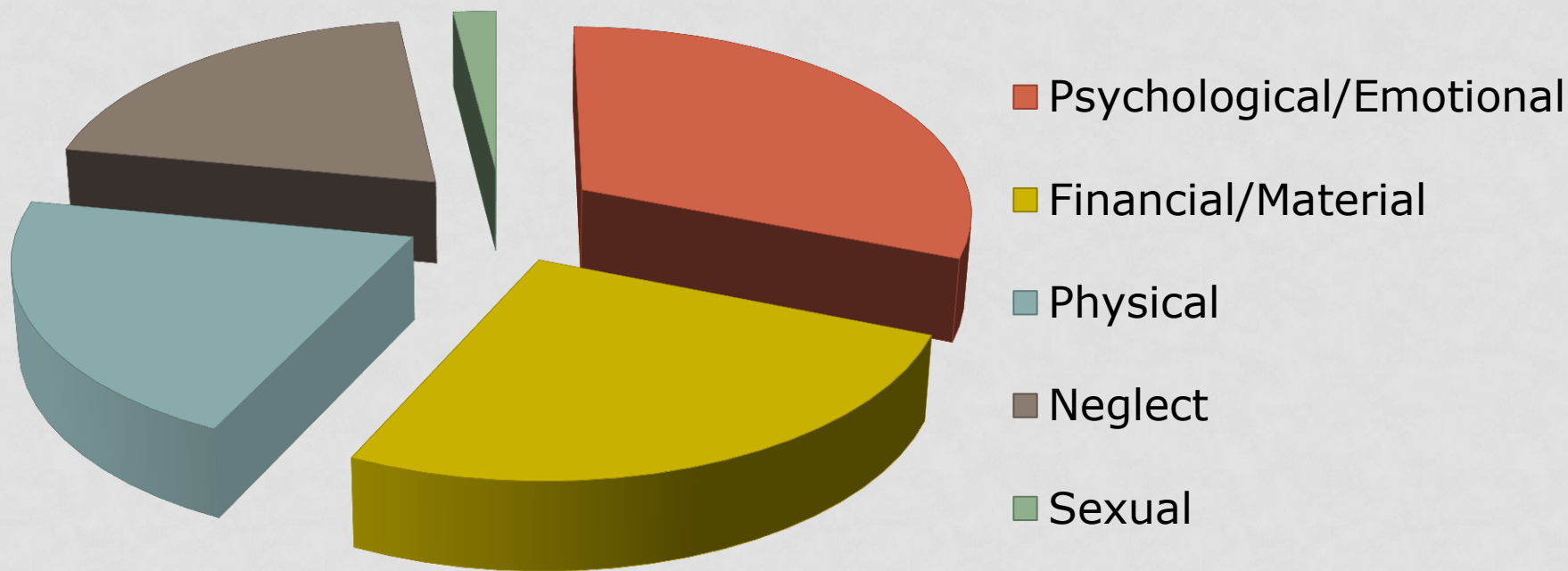
# WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

**Perpetrators (%)**



# WHAT TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE?

## Breaking It Down



# PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- 36% of all reported cases
  - Infliction of anguish, pain or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts.
    - Verbal assaults, insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, threatening, belittling, and harassment.



# FINANCIAL/MATERIAL EXPLOITATION

- 30% of all reported cases
  - Illegal, unauthorized, or improper use of an elder's funds, property, or assets either by a caregiver or scam artist.





# PHYSICAL ABUSE

25% of all reported cases

- Physical force such as hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking and controlling elder's behavior through corporal punishment.

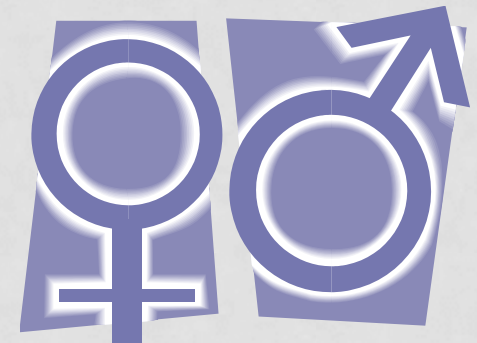
# NEGLECT

- 24% of all reported cases
  - Refusal or failure of an individual to fulfill any part of his/her duties or obligations to an older person, including food, water, shelter, clothing, medicine, comfort, personal hygiene, safety.



# SEXUAL ABUSE

- 2% of all reported cases
- Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind, as well as sexual contact with any older person who is unable to give consent.
  - Unwanted touching
  - Sexual harassment
  - Sexual coercion
  - Sexual assault
    - Rape, sodomy, coerced nudity, sexually explicit photographing



Do you suspect  
abuse?



# HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE IS SUFFERING PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE?

- Threats
- Insults
- Intimidation
- Humiliation
- Harassment
  
- Signs
  - Hesitation in speaking openly with others
  - Withdrawal and unresponsive communication
  - Fear, agitation, anxiety, and helplessness
  - Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, behavior



**“IF ELDER ABUSE HAPPENED TO ME, MICKEY ROONEY, IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE.”**





# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL EXPLOITATION?

- Growing area of concern!
- Encompasses a range of activities
- Third most commonly reported form of elder abuse
- Account for almost 13% of all abuse allegations in 2000; 20.8 % in 2004, 31% in 2010
- Targets for telemarketing abuse, internet scams, and investment fraud

# SIGNS OF FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL EXPLOITATION

- Changes in banking or spending habits
- Excessive use of ATM or credit cards
- Abrupt changes in a will, POA, financial documents
- Unpaid bills and utilities
- New “best friends”
- Documents signed under duress
- Unexplained disappearance of valuables or money
- Discovery of an older person’s signature forged on checks, financial transaction documents, etc.
- Uncharacteristic nonpayment of bills
- Anxiety about personal finances
- Signs of intimidation/threat from another person

# HOW COSTLY IS FINANCIAL ELDER ABUSE?

**US\$ 2.6 billion annually!**

- Long-term effects, including credit problems, health issues, depression, and loss of independence
- Victims are likely to be physically frail, cognitively impaired, lonely, or isolated
- Women more likely to be victimized
- 80% of telemarketer calls are made to older people
- **Do Not Call Registry:** 1-888-382-1222 to eliminate telemarketing calls

# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ELDER ABUSE?

- Bruises, welts, discoloration, swelling
- Cuts, lacerations, puncture wounds
- Pale appearance
- Sunken eyes, hollow cheeks
- Pain or tenderness on touching
- Detached retina
- Soiled clothing or bed
- Absence of hair/bleeding scalp
- Dehydration/malnutrition without illness related cause
- Evidence of inadequate care (e.g. untended bed sores, poor skin hygiene)
- Evidence of inadequate or inappropriate administration of medication
- Burns: May be caused by cigarettes, flames, acids, or friction from ropes
- Signs of confinement (tied to furniture, bathroom fixtures, locked in room)
- Lack of bandages on injuries or stitches when indicated, or evidence of unset bones



# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF NEGLECT?

- **Intentional neglect**

- Caregiver knowingly and purposely fails to provide the items and services needed to keep the elder safe from physical, mental, or emotional harm

- **Unintentional Neglect**

- Rooted in a lack of knowledge and/or ability to provide care for the older person
- Poor hygiene, breakdown of skin, malnourishment or dehydration
- Unsanitary or unclean living conditions
- Unsafe or hazardous living conditions

# WHAT IS SELF-NEGLECT?

- Most commonly reported form of elder abuse
- More common among 85 and older
- Individual wants to remain independent
- 28% of all investigated reports
- High functioning elders also self-neglect



# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF SEXUAL ELDER ABUSE?

- **Physical signs include:**

- Bruises around the breasts or genital area
- Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections
- Genital or anal pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding.
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- An elder's report of being sexually assaulted or raped. Bruising on inner thighs
- Difficulty walking or standing
- Exacerbation of existing illness

- **Emotional signs include:**

- Scared or timid behavior
- Depressed, withdrawn behavior
- Sudden changes in personality
- Odd, misplaced comments about sex or sexual behavior
- Fear of certain people or of physical characteristics



# Reporting abuse

# HOW AND WHERE DO I REPORT ABUSE?

- Take accusations seriously and get details
- Physical, financial, and sexual abuse are crimes subject to prosecution
- All states have reporting systems
- Report abuse to Adult Protective Services (APS)

# WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I FILE AN ELDER ABUSE REPORT?

- Adult Protective Services investigation
- Assistance/intervention
- Address identified problems
- APS is concerned with protecting the safety and dignity of the older adult.



# ARE SITUATIONS OF ABUSE ALWAYS PROSECUTED?

- Reluctance to report abuse or seek prosecution
- Fear of retaliation
- Unable to serve as a witness (incapacitated)
- Fear of nursing home
- Fear of embarrassment
- No knowledge of being scammed in instances of financial exploitation

## IF I SUSPECT ABUSE IN A NURSING HOME OR OTHER RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITY, WHAT DO I DO?

- Contact your area's long-term care ombudsman.
- Program is federally funded, acts on behalf of individuals in residential care facilities; ensure rights are protected.
- Contact ombudsman through local Area Agency on Aging
- Eldercare Locator: **1-800-677-1116**



# WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT MYSELF FROM BECOMING A VICTIM OF ELDER ABUSE?

- Avoid isolation
- Keep in touch with family/friends
- Stay social, active, make new friends
- Volunteer, become a surrogate grandparent, mentor a child
- Participate in religious/community activities



# WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT MY LOVED ONES FROM BECOMING VICTIMS OF ELDER ABUSE?

- If you are a caregiver, seek respite care on a regular basis so that you do not become overwhelmed with caregiving responsibilities
- If your family member is being cared for by a paid caregiver or in a facility, remain involved and observant of quality care, look for signs of abuse or neglect
- Watch for changes in mood or appearance
- Be especially vigilant if family member has a cognitive problem
- Provide family member with tips related to phone solicitations
- Consider counseling/support group if feeling stressed or overwhelmed with caregiving responsibilities

# RESOURCES

- AARP [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)
- National Center on Elder Abuse [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)
- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse [www.preventelderabuse.org](http://www.preventelderabuse.org)
- National Center for the Victims of Crime [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)
- National Consumers League's Fraud Center [www.fraud.org](http://www.fraud.org)
- Eldercare Locator [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)
- National Adult Protective Services Association <http://www.apsnetwork.org/>
- National Association of Area Agencies on Aging [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)
- To report a suspected case of elder abuse in **Michigan**, contact the State's 24-hour hotline by calling **800-996-6228**.

THANK  
YOU

