

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting--2/1/2005

PRESENT: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Matt Johnston (Change Point), Brad Peterson (NW Christian Counseling), Jennifer Warren (Men's Resource Center), Joyce DeMonnin (Elder Safe), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Songcha Bowman (Multi-Cultural Counseling Services)

Minutes by Paula Manley

ELDER ABUSE

Guest speaker: Joyce DeMonnin, MPH (joyce_demonnin@co.washington.or.us)

Joyce works with ElderSafe, under the Washington County Sheriff's Office, working with elderly victims.

Nearly 20% of those 65 and older need at least some kind of assistance – someone to go to the grocery store all the way up to total care. Those who need assistance most are ideal targets for those seeking to take advantage. Methamphetamine addicts frequently abuse the elderly.

In 2004, of the crimes committed against the elderly in Washington County, 26 were by a caregiver, 15 by daughters, 28 by sons, 27 by grandchildren, 9 by spouses, 64 known unrelated, 8 other, unknown 333. Drug history: 42 yes, 33 no, 650 unknown. Mental health issues: 14 yes, 204 no, 507 unknown. Criminal history noted on police report: 63 yes, 3 no, 659 unknown. Assaults included 1 by grandchild, 3 by known unrelated, 1 by son, 1 by daughter, 1 by husband, 1 by related other.

The original Criminal Mistreatment statute originally omitted sexual mistreatment. (This is in process of change.) It includes, however, making it a Class C felony for any caregiver who steals from an elder. Of Criminal Mistreatment perpetrators, 9 were caregivers, 1 daughter, 1 related other. Harassment cases include 1 grandchild, 2 husbands, 3 known unrelated, 7 unknown. Menacing stats include: 1 related other, 1 son, 1 unknown. Sex crime: 1 caregiver, 1 unknown, unrelated and 1 unknown. Theft: 13 caregivers, 2 daughters, 2 grandchildren, 21 know, unrelated, 2 related other, 6 sons, 159 unknown, 1 wife.

People who are caregivers for elders are often frustrated and burned out. Those people who tend to hit – those with power and control issues – will hit the elderly. People who don't have these issues won't hit, regardless.

Elder abuse can be frustrating. With child abuse, law enforcement has the power to take the children into protective custody. But elders have the right to make the decision, and law enforcement can't remove them unless they are a danger to self or others. Besides,

there are no shelters designed for these elderly victims. Besides, it is often the victim's home and she may not want to leave.

A big issue coming up is what to do with all the elderly sex offenders. We will see more cases where these individuals are molesting others in nursing homes, etc. There are already cases of residents molesting other residents.

Financial abuse is the most common form of elder abuse. However, it may not be the only kind of abuse going on. Bennet Blum is a forensic psychologist who specializes in Elder Abuse. He tells how the perpetrator will speak for the victim, complain how the money spent on care of victim is spent, will be very controlling. You want to watch for someone who is the victim's "new best friend." The perpetrator may spend time with the elders, and will work to control and manipulate. They tend to isolate the victim from others. They make the victim become emotionally dependent on them. You will see the victims being groomed. He may convince the victim that no one but he can take care of them. He will tell the elder, "I'm the only one you can trust – your kids just care about your money. When the kids see the abuse, they do become concerned. When they address the money issues, this confirms the paranoia seed the perpetrator has planted. When the victim is not the complainant, it is difficult for police to see what is going on.

Joyce did a case study published in *Victimization of the Elderly and Disabled*, January/February 2005. This dealt with an elder abuse manslaughter case involving gay domestic partners.

Elderly partner, family member who is an adult and caregiver are the three groups of people who may abuse elderly. Domestic violence is most common under the caregiver. Elderly partner abuse often is not reported. There is probably quite a bit of this going on, but the victim doesn't report. But in a longstanding domestic violence relationship, the violence continues. Also, where there has been a lot of continued violence over the years, he has established a lot of control through his abuse. Joyce says they do see a lot of violence with alcoholic elderly.

Some people seek to exploit the elderly. Joyce estimates targeted elder abuse is probably not being reported 80% of the time. There are cases where a great deal of economic abuse has occurred and not reported – the person is run out of town, but not prosecuted, leaving him to offend again. Some "contractors" go around door to door, seeking to take advantage of gullible people. 90% of elders who are duped are too embarrassed to report it. Also, when these crimes are reported to police, police may say, "It's a civil issue." This is untrue – it is a crime. In fact, the CCB has a team of investigators working on people who pull construction scams. Sometimes elders who find out they have been scammed may be afraid of retribution.

When there is a significant age difference in a romantic relationship, when the older partner is arrested for domestic violence, it should be looked at whether the older person might be a secondary aggressor.

There are some vulnerable, lonely older folks. People may come at them like vultures, to take advantage of them for personal gain. There is a line between personal choice and vulnerability. One woman in CA dressed as a nurse and hung out until a millionaire older guy took her home. She said she'd take care of him, stayed with him. She starved him to death. She got a couple years prison for this, but wound up with his whole estate.

We need to look at what happens when an older victim says "no." If the younger person manipulates the situation and won't respect the elder's wishes, it is abuse. However, even if it is abusive, how do you deal with that legally?

The key to understanding domestic violence is that it is not *only* that the perpetrator is abusive. It is also that there exists a power differential.

When you have people who are conning elders out of their money, what is the implication? When huge amounts of money are being transferred around to the offender, this formerly well-off individual becomes a ward of the state. This impacts not only them, but also society. So society has a stake in assuring that these people are not wiped out. Therefore, this "free choice" to do with their income what they want also impacts us.

We don't honor age in our society. Older people feel they are viewed as useless after they retire. So when someone gives them affection, this is intoxicating. They are so vulnerable to someone who is nice to them. It is our society that causes this. We need to look at who perpetrators are, how they groom their victims, and what can be done to help. There may be many psychopaths hovering around the elderly, hoping to exploit them. This subgroups of abusers may realize how vulnerable are elders, and seek them out as targets.

Concerning domestic violence, what are the implications for us? What should we do? In domestic violence, we are less likely to see perpetrators. There is less likelihood of prosecution, for one thing. To work with elderly perpetrators, we need to look outside of the justice system, via a coordinated community response. Elderly perpetrators may abuse physically less frequently, though this still occurs. Abuse is more than the physical abuse, and we still need to confront that. We need to think about how to intervene and prevent this violence, even though it may not be illegal. The faith-based programs may be helpful in dealing with these, as they likely won't be mandated perpetrators. We must confront the intimidation, control, verbal and psychological violence.