

Perpetrators of Elder Abuse

There is a tendency to focus on what puts elders at risk of abuse, but **understanding the characteristics of abusers**, and the wider contributing social factors, **is a better predictor of elder abuse**, and also a better **prevention strategy** (1).

Most elder abuse occurs in the community, **in elders' homes** (2). The abuser is most often **trusted** by the older adult. Most often an intimate partner or spouse; a child, grandchild, other relative (60%); a neighbor or friend; a caregiver or other professional in the community.

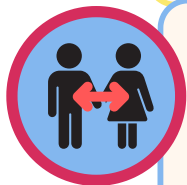
While **all abusers must be held accountable** for their behavior, experts have proposed a continuum of abusive characteristics to help us prevent elder abuse. For example, "bad actors", "ready exploiters", "reluctant exploiters", and "ignorant abusers" (3).



Personal Factors

- High levels of hostility and/or entitlement.
- Charming, attentive, and persuasive - to build trust.
- Lack of empathy and impulse control.
- Inability to cope with frustration.
- History of disruptive behavior, and underemployment.
- Substance abuse and/or mental health conditions, especially while being dependent on the elder.
- Caregiving responsibilities at an early age.

1 in 6 people aged 60 years and older experience **elder abuse** (4).



Relational Factors

- Problematic views about older adults (ageism), caregiving, and rights of others.
- Dependency on the elder they abuse.
- Difficulty establishing positive relationships.
- Social isolation and small social network.
- Exposure to abuse, especially as a child.
- Past family conflict.



Community Factors

- Limited access to health and community services.
- Inadequate preparation/training for caregivers.
- In institutional settings: staffing problems and lack of qualified staff, staff burnout and stressful working conditions.



Societal Factors

- Cultural values and expectations that devalue elders, and/or shape views about caregiving, and about what abuse is.
- Traditional and patriarchal views of the family.
- A culture of self-sufficiency and individualism.
- Cuts to State and federal funding.

Factors

Societal

Community

Relational

Personal

E.g. Ageism

Caregiver stress plays much **less** of a role **than once thought**. Instead, **ageism, entitlement, and power and control** dynamics more often drive abusive behavior among caregivers (5).

References: 1. Chang, 2021; 2. Jackson, 2014; 3. Brandl and Raymond, 2012; 4. Yon et al., 2017; Teaster and Roberto, 2021; Dong et al., 2014; Bolkan et. al., 2023; CDC, 2020.