

GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY
FACT SHEET ON ELDER ABUSE

**ELDER ABUSE IS
UNDER-RECOGNIZED AND
UNDER-REPORTED**

Brooke Astor and Mickey Rooney – other than their fame and fortune, what do they have in common? Unfortunately, it's elder abuse!

Every day, headlines paint a grim picture of seniors who have been abused, neglected, and exploited - often by people they trust the most. The abuse of Brooke Astor and Mickey Rooney shows that no one is immune. Although more than one in ten elder may experience abuse, according to the National Center for Elder Abuse, only 2%-10% of all cases are reported.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Elder abuse can occur to anyone, anywhere – at home, in a nursing home, hospital or other institution. Dementia is a risk factor as is mental health and substance abuse - of both abusers and victims. Isolation can also contribute to risk.

WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

Abusers are family members, friends, paid home attendants or employees of institutions. They can be caregivers who lack adequate skills, training, time, or energy, or who no longer can tolerate the fluctuations in the elder's need for care, incontinence, disturbed sleep, lack of support from family, or they can be opportunistic strangers who prey on the vulnerable.

**BARRIERS TO IDENTIFYING
VICTIMS OF ELDER ABUSE**

Cultural or language barriers may cause victims to keep their "secret"; they want to remain loyal to family, love their child and are embarrassed to report their child as abusive; they rely on their caregiver for everything and can't risk being abandoned.

And some victims may not even realize they are being abused.

TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse is an intentional or neglectful act by a caregiver or "trusted" individual that leads to or may lead to harm of a vulnerable older person.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Use of force to threaten or physically injure a vulnerable elder

What to look for:

Bruises, especially in clusters or regular patterns in areas such as neck or groin; burns - commonly on soles, palms or buttocks; overmedicating, tranquilizing elders in nursing homes or at home for convenience of caregiver; failure to administer prescribed drugs; sudden withdrawn behavior; refusal of caregiver to allow visitors to see the elder alone

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Verbal attacks, threats, rejection, isolation, or belittling acts that cause or could cause mental anguish, pain, or distress to a senior

What to look for:

Agitation, fearful behavior notably around certain people; withdrawal, apathy; unusual actions such as sucking, biting, and rocking; yelling, humiliating, intimidating, ridiculing behaviors of caregiver towards elder

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual contact that is forced, tricked, threatened, or otherwise coerced on a vulnerable elder, or anyone who is unable to grant consent

What to look for:

Genital or anal pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding; torn or bloody clothing; unexplained venereal disease, genital infections

ABANDONMENT

Desertion of a frail or vulnerable elder by anyone with a duty of care or by those who have a responsibility to care for the vulnerable elder

EXPLOITATION / FINANCIAL

Theft, fraud, misuse or neglect of authority; use of undue influence as a lever to gain control over an older person's money or property

What to look for:

Sudden bank account changes; unexplained withdrawal(s) when escorted by another; checks written as "loans" or "gifts;" loss of property; additional unexplained names on bank signature card; forging elder's signature on checks; disappearance of funds or valuable possessions; providing substandard care despite adequate finances; sudden transfer of assets or changes in a will; deceiving older person into signing a contract or other document; mismanagement or embezzling of pre-paid money by a funeral home that was supposed to be in trust to pay for the senior's funeral services

NEGLECT

Caregiver's failure or refusal to provide for vulnerable elder's safety, physical, emotional needs

What to look for:

Bedsoures, untreated health condition, e.g. not regularly clean incontinent elder; unsanitary, unsafe living conditions e.g. vermin, soiled bedding; letting Alzheimer's patient wander outside alone; signs of dehydration or malnutrition; absence of needed dentures, eyeglasses, hearing aids, walkers, wheelchairs, braces, or commodes

SELF-NEGLECT

An elder's inability to understand consequences of one's own actions or inaction, which leads to, or may lead to, harm or endangerment

What to look for:

Hoarding objects e.g. newspapers, garbage; disarray by someone who used to be well-groomed; improperly clothed based on temperature and weather conditions; isolating oneself from activities they used to participate in, such as church.

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WHAT CAN PHILOPTOCHOS DO TO PREVENT ELDER ABUSE?

- **Education is empowerment** – Duplicate and distribute this fact sheet to your members, priest, parishioners of your Church and members of your local community.
- **Be aware of the possibility of abuse** – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Has their behavior changed recently? Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people when they have not seemed so in the past?
- **Report suspected mistreatment** to your local adult protective services or law enforcement agency. Even if you think a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, speak out again.
- **Keep in contact** – Stay in touch with and talk to your older friends, neighbors, relatives and fellow parishioners. Maintaining communication helps decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It also will give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing. Keep in touch with your friends who are caregivers, too. They, too, need someone to talk to.
- **Ask if someone looks like something may be wrong** - If it looks to you like something “out of sorts” is happening with someone, ask, “Are you OK? Is there anything you’d like to talk about?” If you feel you may not be able to handle what they may tell you, ask your priest to talk to that person.
- **Give someone a “break”** – If a friend or fellow parishioner is the primary caregiver for an older person, offer to stay with the older person for an hour or so to give the caregiver some free time to do something for him/herself, like go to a hair salon or nail salon, or to the movies.
- **Adult Day Centers** – Find out if there are day programs in your community for persons with dementia or who are suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, and give that information to your friend or acquaintance who is the primary caregiver for an older person. Some of these programs accept Medicaid and insurances, while others are low-cost or accept payment on a sliding scale..
- **Find out if there is a “crisis program” or “respite care” in your community** – Some communities offer “crisis nurseries” for parents who fear they may abuse their child - it gives the parent a break for a few hours or a day or so. Find out if there is a similar program at a local nursing home or other institution for caregivers of older people. If there isn’t one, lobby to get one started.
- **Volunteer** – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support to seniors. Contact your local United Way for information.
- **Contact your local Area Agency on Aging** to identify local programs and sources of support. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse. Find yours at: <http://www.n4a.org/programs/eldercare-locator/>
- **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day: June 15th** - Elder abuse is a global issue. Contact your local aging services organizations to find out how your community observes World Day and participate in some of the events. Help to raise awareness by talking about the issue.
- **Learn more about the issue** - Visit the *National Center on Elder Abuse* website at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

For More Information:

- **National Council on Elder Abuse:** www.ncea.aoa.gov
- **Eldercare Locator:** 1-800-677-1116 or online at www.eldercare.gov
- **National Long Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center** <http://www.ltombudsman.org/>
- **National Center on Elder Abuse** (*Cases of actual or suspected elder abuse should NOT be reported to the NCEA - If the situation is serious, threatening, or dangerous, call 9-1-1 or the local police for immediate help*)
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