Abuse against older adults:
Working together using a relational approach

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OBJECTIVES

- Describe a model of practice that emerged through the evaluation of a partnership program between the police and a Family Service organization;

- Identify the implications for practice of drawing upon a relational lens for understanding and responding to situations of abuse of older adults
MODEL

- Partnership between the local police department and a not-for-profit family service agency

- One detective and one counselor/victim support worker
  - Counsellor is located in police department

- Mandate is to follow-up on patrol investigations of elder abuse cases in which there are Criminal Code violations
  - Detective focuses on offender accountability
  - Counselor focuses on older person’s safety and community networking
Two pilot sites were studied

Purpose:
- Describe how program is used;
- Obtain consumer (client and service provider) feedback;
- Describe unique challenges and strengths of program

Multi-method data generation which (combined) included:
- Client-based Demographic Survey (n=146)
- Review of Program Documents
- Consumer Interviews (n=11)
- Service Provider interviews (n=28)
- Team interviews – two per site
Reason for Referral

Referral Problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse or Assault</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse or Assault</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Abuse</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Abuse</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harassment or Threats</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Client Profile

- Mostly women (76%)
- Average age was 75 with 45% being over 80 years old
- Cultural background:
  - Caucasian (68%)
  - Aboriginal (7.5%)
  - Visible minority (23%)
- Majority (58%) lived with perpetrator
  - 40% lived ONLY with perpetrator
  - 30% lived alone
Victim/Perpetrator Relationship

Relationship of Alleged Offender to Victim ($n=122$)

- Spouse/Partner: 21.3%
- Child: 51.6%
- Non-Family: 18.9%
- Other Family: 8.2%
Health Issues: Client

Client Health Concerns

- None: 29.3%
- Physical Health: 39.8%
- Mental Health: 25.2%
- Dementia: 17.9%
- Alcohol/Addiction: 3.3%
- Other: 8.9%
Health Issues: Perpetrator

Offender Health Concerns

- None: 35.4%
- Physical Health: 12.2%
- Mental Health: 30.5%
- Dementia: 2.4%
- Alcohol/Addiction: 37.8%
- Other: 4.9%
Making Sense of Demographics

- Importance of differentiating between longstanding wife abuse, abuse against older adults by unwell children, and stranger abuse
  - Different dynamics and issues
  - Different contexts for exploring needs and decision-making
- Attend to our use of language.
  - Caregiver/care-receiver language inadvertently ‘blames’ the victim and positions perpetrator in a helping role
- Adapt a lens that addresses power and relationships!
Dimensions of Effective Intervention
Towards a Relational Model

- Creating a human anchor
- Constructing a Communication Bridge
- Balancing Authority with Relationship
- Recognizing relational context of abuse
Relationship Building
Creating a human “anchor”

- Recognizing victim’s reluctance to seek and accept help:
  - Protection of child
  - Cognitive Changes
  - Failure to recognize extent of danger and/or position self as abused

- Engaging with client in relational role (as a parent) not just as ‘victim’

- Creating a non-judgemental and accepting context where client felt ‘liked’

- Offering personalized (flexible and creative) long-term involvement

- Being responsive when client initiates contact
Communication Bridge
Building relationships across sectors

- Facilitating Client Connections
  - Keeping mothers informed of son’s well-being
    - “He’s still my son, no matter what. I’m worried, worried, worried… I want to know he’s safe no matter what he does”
  - Helping clients to negotiate the system

- Co-ordinating health, social and justice systems
  - Better coordination of information, less duplication
  - Making criminal system accessible to health and social care providers
  - Facilitate smoother transitions for clients
Authority and Relationship: Achieving Balance

- Importance of police involvement
  - Protection
    - Restraining or no contact orders
    - Awareness of 911 as an option
  - Legitimized danger of situation

- Without police intervention, situations were unlikely to change

- However, sole reliance upon ONLY police intervention, created challenges to insuring long-term change
  - Firm belief that perpetrator needed help not a record!
  - Child’s needs are often prioritised over personal safety needs so police intervention can be a threat and resisted
Relational context of abuse
Engaging the family

- Helping client means helping perpetrator
- Role of other family
  - Advocate and support for client
  - Address personal feelings of loss and fear
Relationship-centered Identity

- Women's sense of self is developed and defined through her relationships with others;
- High value is placed on her ability to develop, maintain, and sustain relationships;
- Highlights importance of an 'other' for confirming, validating and/or challenging sense of self worth
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Capacity to work with client and offender on a long-term basis
- Confidentiality of counselor/victim support worker role within the partnership
- Importance of a dyadic focus toward intervention;
- Effective intervention = relationship + authority
Summary

- These cases are COMPLEX!
- Effective intervention must develop an integrated approach that includes social and health care systems in partnership with the criminal justice system.
- At the core is the importance of taking a relational lens in order to
  - Recognize the importance of relational connection between the person who is abusing and the older adult who is the ‘victim’;
  - Provide support that is ‘personal’ to that situation;
  - Foster a dyadic approach, recognizing role of professional to validate and sustain important relational roles
- A multi-jurisdictional approach is important to create sustained change in the lives of these clients