

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

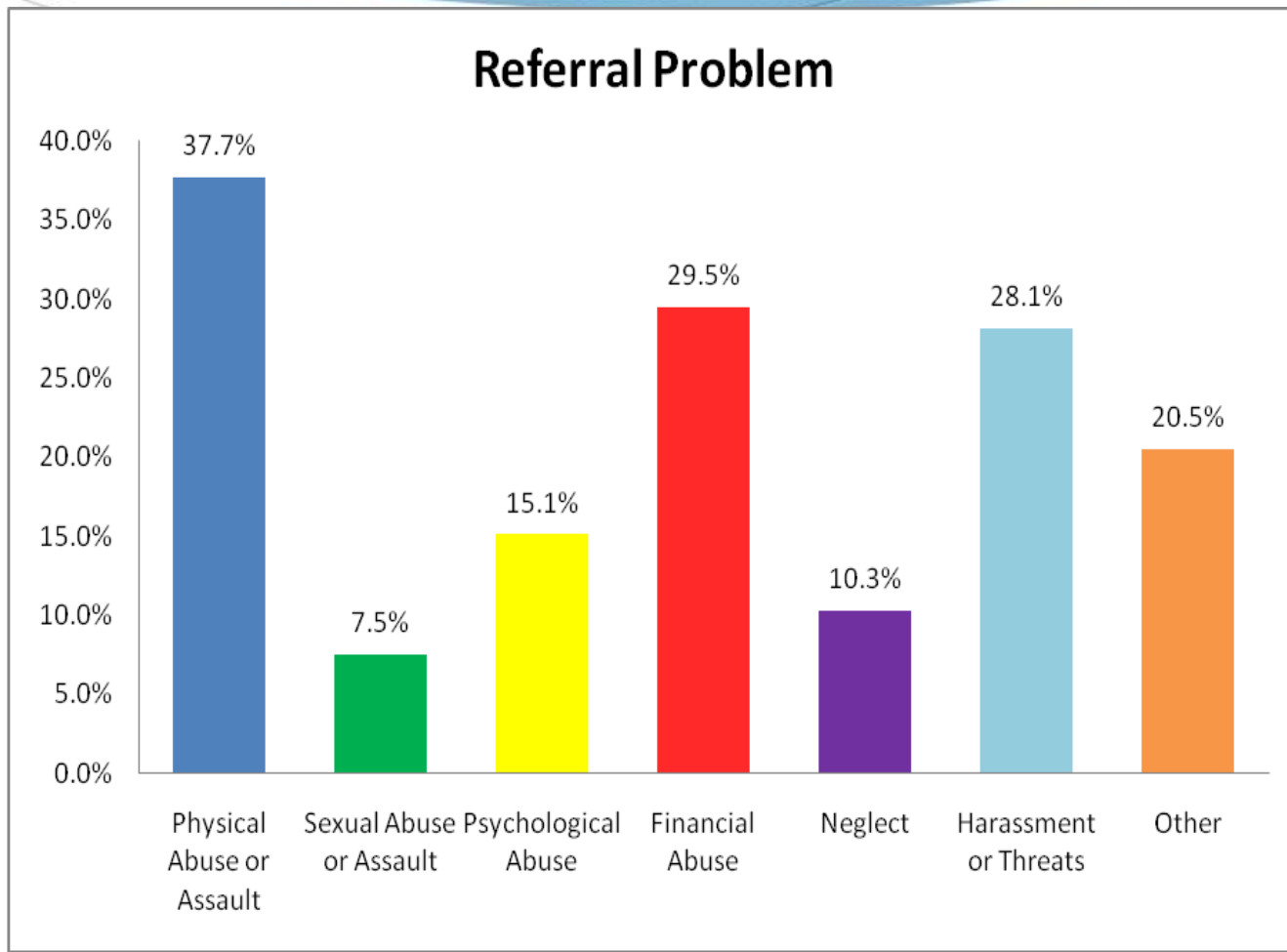
MODEL

- 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*

Pilot Evaluations

- 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

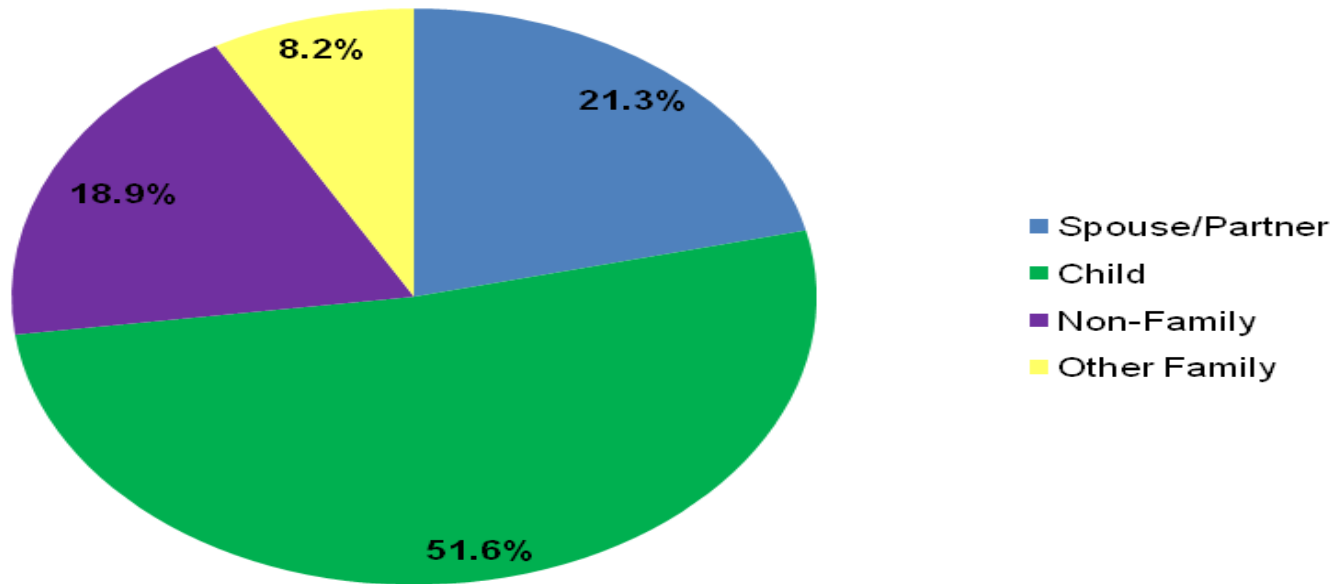


Client Profile

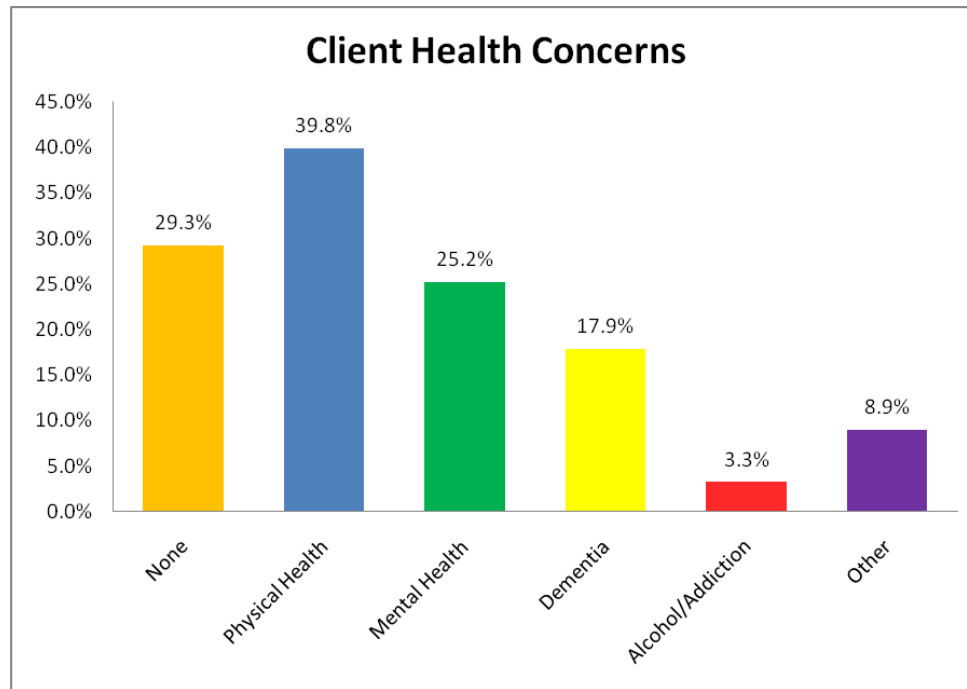
- Mostly women (76%)
- Average age was 75 with 45% being over 80 years old
- Cultural background:
 - *Caucasian (68%)*
 - *Aboriginal (7.5%)*
 - *Visible minority (23%)*
- Majority (58%) lived with perpetrator
 - *40% lived ONLY with perpetrator*
 - *30 % lived alone*

Victim/Perpetrator Relationship

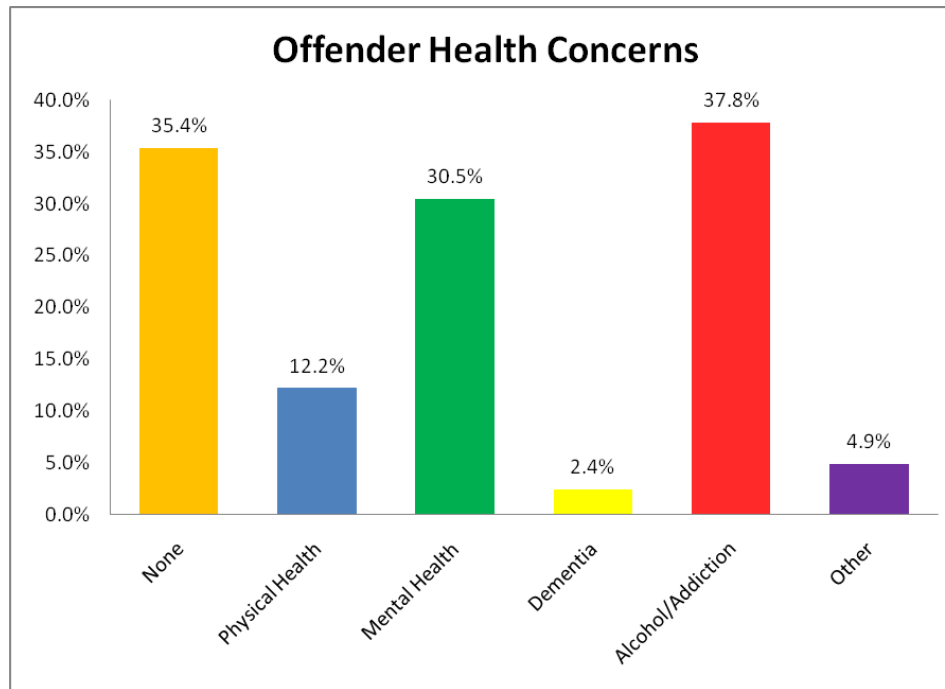
Relationship of Alleged Offender to Victim ($n=122$)



Health Issues: Client



Health Issues: Perpetrator



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