

## APA Official Actions

### Position Statement on Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2008  
Approved by the Assembly, May 2008  
Reaffirmed, December 2014  
Approved by the Assembly, November 2018  
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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

#### Issue:

Elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation have been identified as major public health problems. All 50 states have adopted either mandatory or voluntary reporting laws. Abuse may be physical, emotional, and/or sexual, and may include threats, insults, harassment, harsh orders, infantilization, restriction of social and religious activity, financial exploitation, and failure to provide a safe environment. Older adults who suffer abuse, neglect and/or exploitation may be located in caregiving settings ranging from home to skilled nursing facilities. They may experience significant shame and ambivalence about prosecuting the perpetrators, especially when they are family members. Those with common geriatric syndromes such as cognitive impairment, delirium, falls, stroke, incontinence and overall decreased mobility are particularly vulnerable to victimization. Psychiatric symptoms seen in abused elderly persons may include, but are not limited to, resignation, ambivalence, fear, anger, cognitive impairment, insomnia, substance abuse, delirium, agitation, lethargy, and self-neglect. Depression and anxiety may result from abuse, and may also increase risk of abuse as vulnerable older adults become more socially isolated. Perpetrators of abuse may also have substance use and/or psychiatric disorders, including dementia, and may themselves require treatment. Elder abuse, neglect and financial exploitation are crimes. Psychiatrists may be called upon to participate in legal proceedings associated with elder abuse and may be in position to advocate for and help empower older adults to participate in this process when appropriate. All of these activities are consistent with the APA’s vision of ensuring humane care and effective treatment for all persons with mental disorders and its mission to promote the highest quality of psychiatric care.

#### APA Position:

**The American Psychiatric Association recommends completion of a comprehensive and culturally competent biopsychosocial assessment of older adult victims and, when clinically indicated, their perpetrators in order to facilitate effective interventions, including the utilization of legal, social and financial resources. Psychiatrists play a pivotal role in the identification and reporting of abuse, mitigation of risk, and treatment of the mental health sequelae of abuse.**

#### Authors:

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