

Sexual Abuse in Later Life

Based on a review of 284 cases of alleged elder sexual assault reported to either the Criminal Justice System (CJS) or Adult Protective Services (APS), the following results were obtained¹:

- **Victims:** 93.5% of victims were female and ranged in age from 60-100. The mean age was 78.4. Of the 181 individuals for whom data were available, 82.3% were Caucasian and the remainder were visible minorities. (p. 342)
- **Location of the Alleged Abuse:** Of 250 cases with data, 72% of alleged sexual abuses occurred in private homes, 23.2% occurred in facilities and 4.8% occurred in other locations. (Id.)
- **Reporters:** One-third of the cases were reported by the elder victims themselves; 20.6% were reported by health care workers; 12.2% were reported by social workers or mental health staff; 12.2% were reported by family member of the elders; and 21.8% were reported by others, e.g., neighbor or friend. (Id.)
- **Forensic Markers:** In 43 cases, a third party witnessed the assault. In other cases, physical trauma (84 elders) and sexually transmitted diseases (6 elders) triggered reporting. In 19 cases, victims displayed shame or guarded response when questioned about possible abuse. In 49 cases, victims displayed fear or strong ambivalent feelings toward suspected offenders. In 25 cases, victims were upset during personal cares. In 18 cases, inappropriate boundaries were observed by

“...Advanced age is no defense against sexual assault.” (p. 348)

“Presently, elder sexual abuse statistics are not included in criminal justice reporting.” (p. 350)

¹ Burgess, A., Ramsey-Klawnsnick, H., & Gregorian, S. (2008). Comparing Routes of Reporting in Elder Abuse Sexual Abuse Cases. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*, 10 (4), 336–352.

others; in 16 cases, the suspected offender was overly intrusive regarding the provision of personal care. In 29 cases, the suspected offender made sexual statements and in 30 cases, displayed sexual behavior. Among the cases for which data was reported (132), 77.3% involved visible physical injuries to the victim. (pp. 342-343)

- **Control:** Mechanisms of control by the alleged offender included verbal threats, mere presence (almost half – 43.3%) or physical beating. (p. 343)
- **Offenders:** In 230 cases with data, 90.9% of the alleged offenders were male and ranged in age from 13 to 90 (7 were under age 20; 4 were over age 90). (Id.)
- **Relationship of Alleged Victims and Offenders:** In 26.1% of the cases, the suspects were strangers; 23.2% involved a family member (incestuous abuse); 15.5% involved the victim's spouse or partner; 10.9% of suspects were an unrelated care provider; 6% were co-residents in facility setting; 7.4% involved an acquaintance. Of the female offenders, one was an unrelated care provider, two were victim's spouse/partner; and five were other family members. (Id.)
- **Nature of the Abuse:** Direct contact acts included sexualized kissing; fondling of breasts and genitals; and penetration of vagina, mouth, or anus. Non-contact acts included exhibitionism; unwelcome sexual discussions; sexual jokes or comments, and unwelcome sexual interests, e.g., forcing pornography on the elder. (pp. 343-344)
- **Evidentiary and Rape Exam:** Fewer than half of the elders (42.9%) were referred for a forensic rape examination. In 20 cases (out of 205 with such data), actions were taken to destroy evidence (e.g., washing the victim's bedding and clothing). (pp. 344-345)

“... Cases in which relationships existed between alleged victims and offenders tended not to be initially referred to [the Criminal Justice System]. These cases were less frequently investigated as potential crimes” (p. 348)

“For the most part, the alleged sexual perpetrators had easy access to vulnerable individuals via their employment or residence, their status as family members, or visiting the facilities in which elders lived and received care.”² (p. 362)

2. Ramsey-Klawnsnik, H., Teaster, P., Mendiando, M., Marcum, J., & Abner, E. (2008). Sexual Predators Who Target Elders: Findings from the First National Study of Sexual Abuse in Care Facilities. *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*. 10 (4), 353–376.

- **Outcomes:** Of the cases reported to the CJS, there were 63 arrests (out of 210 cases with data). Out of 226 cases with data, 180 identified offenders, 99 offenders were referred to prosecutors, 17 cases went to trial and resulted in convictions, 8 went to trial and resulted in acquittals and 11 were resolved by plea agreements. In 35 cases, 19 victims refused to cooperate with the prosecution. In 39 cases of spousal/partner abuse, 20 were referred to the prosecutor but were not charged with a crime. (pp. 345-356)