

## Elder Abuse Revealed: Is There A Rationale For A Multidisciplinary Approach?

Georgia J. Anetzberger, PhD, ACSW

### The answer is “yes” for three reasons

- The nature and scope of elder abuse demand it.
- The history of elder abuse interventions reflects it.
- Federal and state laws on elder abuse leave no other alternative.

### What about elder abuse demands a multidisciplinary approach?

### Elder abuse is complex.

- It takes many forms, but the more common ones are less likely to be reported to those charged to help.
- It occurs across settings, with nursing homes perhaps the most dangerous formal care ones.

### Elder abuse is big.

- It is twice as prevalent as previously thought.
- It may be slightly more frequent than intimate partner violence and twice as frequent as child abuse.

### Elder abuse is serious.

- Victims are more likely to die prematurely than non-victims.
- The costs can be staggering.

## **What about the history of elder abuse interventions reflects a multidisciplinary approach?**

### **The earliest attempts to address elder abuse were multidisciplinary.**

- A multidisciplinary response originated with “protective care” in the 1950s.
- The 1961 White House Conference on Aging called upon the disciplines of social work, medicine, and law to cooperate in serving “older people who are in need of social protection”.
- The 1982 University of Southern Maine’s National Guide Series: Improving Protective Services for Older Americans concludes by stating “two types of community and interdisciplinary team concepts hold particular promise: case review teams and community protective services coalitions”.

**Elder abuse-related laws cut across systems at both federal and state levels.**

Several elder abuse classifications emerged over time, each one with a distinctive discipline or system.

- Social problem
- Medical syndrome
- Aspect of family violence
- Crime
- Violation of human rights
- Public health concern

## **How do federal and state laws on elder abuse require a multidisciplinary approach?**

### **Federal examples:**

- Older Americans Act
- Violence Against Women Act
- Elder Justice Act
- Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act 1987
- Social Services Block Grant
- Others

## Ohio examples:

- Adult Protective Services Law
- Protective Services Law for Persons with Developmental Disabilities
- Abuse or Neglect of a Functionally Disabled Person Law
- Nursing Home Bill of Rights
- Domestic Violence Law
- Others

The dynamics of individual case situations can necessitate the application of various laws and cooperation of relevant systems.

- Adult protective services
- Long-term care ombudsman
- Aging network
- Law enforcement
- Health care
- Public health
- Domestic violence programming
- Others

What are common multidisciplinary approaches to elder abuse?

- Interdisciplinary teams
- Special centers
- Community coalitions

What does the literature identify as the benefits of a multidisciplinary approach to elder abuse?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| □ increased problem awareness                                   | □ reduction of inappropriate/duplicative responses                              |
| □ holistic case assessment                                      | □ less case recidivism  |
| □ creative/comprehensive case plans                             | □ fewer turf issues   |
| □ prevention of case dumping                                    | □ better access to information/service options                                  |
| □ improved understanding of discipline/system roles/limitations | □ improved relations/communication among individuals across disciplines/systems |

What does the literature suggest as the essential qualities for an effective multidisciplinary approach to elder abuse?

- common purpose/goals
- capable leadership
- belief in the importance of collaboration
- strong infrastructure
- valuing the contribution of others
- mutual accountability among members
- commitment to openly sharing information
- results-oriented approach

**What does research reveal about multidisciplinary elder abuse teams?**

- There has been very little rigorous outcome evaluation of them.
- Studies on their outputs and member satisfaction suggest:
  - high attendance at meetings
  - more specialized assessments
  - more prosecutions or use of guardianship
  - high satisfaction by case presenters

**Questions?**