

Criminological Theory and Elder Abuse Research—Fruitful Relationship or Worlds Apart?

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Abstract By definition, elder abuse research touches upon topics also covered by criminological theories. However, up until now, attempts to apply criminological theories to this field of research are scarce and the potential of criminological theory to enhance the understanding of elder abuse phenomena appears underdeveloped. The paper explores potentials and limitations of applying both theories and their related concepts from criminology to elder abuse. Financial elder abuse and abuse and neglect in domestic caregiving are chosen as types of offences to discuss the usefulness of criminological theory. A special focus is on Routine Activity Theory (RAT). While basic concepts of RAT (“suitable target”, “absence of capable guardians”) are directly applicable to elder abuse, motivational components have to be added or strengthened to make RAT a powerful framework to understand elder abuse. This is in concordance with general criticisms of RAT focussing upon the mechanisms through which at the intersection of individual and environment, individuals are moved to commit criminal or abusive acts. Wikström’s Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation is discussed with regard to its potential of understanding and explaining incidents of elder abuse and neglect.

Keywords Elder abuse · Criminology · Deviance · Opportunity · Financial abuse · Family caregiving

This paper aims to answer the question: to what extent can criminological theories contribute to the understanding of elder abuse? Current elder abuse research is at the

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crossroads of multiple scientific, political and practice discourses. It is inspired—among others—by sociology (especially family sociology), health and nursing sciences, gerontology, social work, psychology, and—up until now, only to a rather small proportion—criminology. Each of these disciplines constructs elder abuse in different ways and applies its specific concepts to it.¹ The variety of conceptual approaches, leading to an array of methodological approaches, is also due to the scope and heterogeneity of phenomena subsumed under the concept of *elder abuse*—touching upon topics generally handled by different academic disciplines. Approaching a broadly and not always very precisely defined phenomenon (Daly and Jogerst 2001; Payne and Byars 1999) from a multitude of loosely interrelated disciplines leads to widely different constructions and conceptions of elder abuse—as a health problem, a family or domestic violence problem, an intergenerational relations’ problem, a social problem, a criminal justice problem, etc. (see Baumann 1989; Harbison and Morrow 1998; Hugman 1995, on social construction of abuse).

Elder Abuse as Deviance and Crime

Elder abuse may be conceived as a *deviant behaviour*. Deviance is a term rooted in sociology, referring to behaviour or activity that breaks social norms and violates shared standards. Thus, deviance includes and at the same time goes beyond the meaning of *crime* by not being tied to the violation of criminal laws but including informal social rules and conventions, ethical standards, organizational rules, and laws (other than those laid own in the criminal code²). Such a perspective may be useful for analyzing elder abuse phenomena. Elder abuse clearly comprises criminal acts (like severe physical assault, rape, fraud, theft, threat, or neglect causing death) but most definitions of elder abuse and most scientific measures applied to it include behaviours violating norms of social conduct but not necessarily criminal laws (like yelling at a person or holding somebody up to ridicule).

Strain and Control Perspectives on Deviance and Crime

If the deviance perspective is taken, questions as to theoretical approaches to explain deviance and crime arise. One attempt—mainly coming from the field of criminology—to structure the multiplicity of theories of deviant or norm-violating behaviour has been the suggestion to differentiate between *strain* and *control* theories (Elliott et al. 1985; Vold et al. 2002). The common feature of *strain theories* is the stance that deviance is caused and can thus be explained by strains and stressors affecting people’s behaviour and by blocked opportunities for non-deviant behaviour. Initially, in industrial societies, inability to achieve economic success was the basic strain identified as conducive to crime (see Merton’s classical anomie theory, 1938). Strain theories are divergent in their assumptions as to the nature of

¹ For example, sociologists and gerontologists are approaching elder abuse done by kin under the heading of intergenerational solidarity and conflict, while psychologists may view it as a burden issue or as reverse violence situation which follows from a past of child abuse or neglect.

² For a discussion and possible extension of the concept of deviance see Heckert and Heckert (2004a, b).

these stressors. Modern strain approaches (Agnew 1992, 2006) have identified—among others—parental rejection, harsh and unfair discipline, bad working conditions, chronic unemployment, marital conflict, discrimination, homelessness, or the inability to achieve certain desired goals (money, status, autonomy, thrill, etc.) as possible strains. Strain theories are united by the perspective of asking what drives people into deviance and empirically testing assumptions about the factors stimulating rule breaking. Agnew (2006) states that strains are most likely to lead to crime when they are strong and perceived as unjust, when social control is low or when the person has little to lose from crime, and when strains imply some pressure or incentive for criminal ways of coping.

Control theories start from a completely different assumption. Here it is not so much deviance, but conformity that needs explanation. Control theorists generally regard the motivational component of the question “why people commit crimes” as rather trivial, since crime can be regarded as a kind of shortcut to benefits which otherwise would have to be earned through work and effort. In this conception, deviance arises when opportunities exist and controls are weak or lacking (as the saying goes “Opportunity makes the thief”). Hirschi (1969) and Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) have provided the most influential versions of control theory. Whereas Hirschi’s *social control theory* states that a *social bond* made out of the elements of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief has the power to keep people away from deviance, Gottfredson’s and Hirschi’s *self-control theory* starts from the assumption that humans have little natural appreciation of the long-term consequences of their acts and must be socialized in that respect. Generally, control theorists are interested in how *sanctions* (and their perception by potential offenders) affect the likelihood that people will deviate from norms. They emphasize the crucial role of *opportunities* (and again of the *perception* of situations and situational elements as opportunities) to explain deviant behaviour and consequently, to organise the prevention strategies to reduce, if not avoid, crime and deviance.

Strain and Opportunity in Elder Abuse Research

Looking at current elder abuse research in a context of dependency of the abused senior in the light of the aforementioned dichotomy, it must be considered to be mainly “on the strain track”, looking for stressors leading caregivers into violent and neglectful behaviour—like caregiver burden (see for example Cooper et al. 2008; Lee 2009; Steinmetz 1988), care recipients’ aggressive and violent behaviour (Pillemer and Suito 1992), social isolation (Compton et al. 1997) or a strained pre-caregiving relationship (Hughes 1997; Nolan 1997; Sadler et al. 1995; Saveman et al. 1996). In most cases, elder abuse researchers make no reference to theories of crime and deviance, but, criminologically speaking, the basic model of thought—looking for burdensome factors impinging upon people and finally driving them to abuse or neglect an older person—is very much in the strain theories chain of thought. Elder abuse research has paid little attention to opportunity and control factors. This may partly be due to the fact that the essence of *strain thinking* requires no specific criminological background but can be found in psychology, sociology or gerontology as well.

In the remaining part of the paper, the authors raise the question to what extent criminological theories taking a more “opportunity centred” perspective might enhance the understanding of elder abuse phenomena. This will mainly be done by looking at two criminological theories, namely *Routine Activity Theory* (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson 2002; Felson and Clarke 1998) and the *Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation* (Wikström 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Wikström and Treiber 2007) and at two major fields of elder abuse, namely *financial exploitation* of older persons (including deceptive offences selectively targeted at the very old) and *abuse and neglect in family caregiving*.

Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) assumes that the organization of people’s daily routine activities creates opportunities for criminal behaviour. Such routines influence the effort needed to commit a crime and the risk associated with it. Since opportunities vary in time, space, across situations and groups of people, so do crime rates. RAT is not a motivational theory of crime, but a theory focussing upon crime events and opportunities. It uses a so-called “crime triangle”, stating that an intentional crime requires a motivated offender, a suitable target, the absence of capable guardians, and the possibility of these three elements to intersect in time and space. Offenders have to overcome the challenge of getting access to their target or victim (targets can be persons but also material objects and impersonal actors). According to Felson (2002), this can be accomplished via *overlapping activity spaces*, out of *personal ties* or *specialized work roles*. Felson coins the term of *crime of specialized access*, defined as “a criminal act committed by abusing one’s job or profession to gain specific access to a crime target” (p.95)

Routine Activity Theory has been used to predict and understand crime trends over time and the distribution of crime across space but also differential victimization risks of social groups (see for example Mustaine and Tewksbury 1998; Fisher et al. 2002). In recent years, Routine Activity Theory has to some extent been discovered by elder abuse researchers. Harris and Benson (2006) answer the question “why nursing homes may be good for abusers” (p. 28) by saying that in some residential care facilities, motivated offenders and suitable targets meet under the conditions of lacking or weak guardianship. They connect the presence of motivated offenders to caregiving strain, low job satisfaction, perceived unfairness of working conditions and nurses’ low self-control. Payne and Fletcher (2005) and Payne and Gainey (2006, 2007) also have taken a routine activities perspective on abuse in institutional care. Payne (2006) and Setterlund et al. (2007) have applied RAT concepts to financial elder abuse, Dietz and Wright (2005) to the topic of victimization of older homeless people. These studies assume that elder abuse may well be regarded as intentional and goal-oriented behaviour. This aspect has often been disregarded by researchers and practitioners in elder abuse preferring to look only at facts to state if there is an incident of abuse or not. However, especially in studies on neglect, we are witnessing a growing interest to distinguish intentional from non intentional acts.

Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation

The basic tenet of Wikström's *Situational action theory* (SAT) is that rule breaking is neither explained by personal factors nor by environmental factors alone, but by their interaction. Humans are regarded as "rule-guided actors" and crime as a special case of moral rule-breaking. Actions are outcomes of perceived action alternatives and choices made by actors. Thus, SAT proposes a situational mechanism ("moral perception-moral choice process") linking person and environment to actions. From a SAT perspective, an individual's perceptions of action alternatives are influenced by that person's morality and executive capabilities. Settings are characterized by *opportunities* (i.e. temptations) and *frictions* (i.e. provocations), and the *moral context* in which both occur. By moral context, SAT means a setting's moral rules and their monitoring and sanctions. When individuals face settings, moral perceptions precede moral choices (i.e. the intention to abide to or break a rule). As summarized by Wikström, the key mechanisms linking setting characteristics to acts of crime are "temptation, defined as a perceived option to satisfy a particular desire (need, want) in an unlawful way, and provocation, defined as a perceived attack on the person's (or his or her significant others) property, security or self-respect encouraging an unlawful response. Temptation occurs in response to opportunity, while provocation occurs in response to frictions. An individual's morals influence what opportunities he or she finds tempting, and what frictions he or she finds provoking. The key suggested inhibiting mechanism is conceptualized as deterrence, defined as the perceived risk of intervention, and associated risk of sanction if acting unlawfully in pursuing a temptation or responding to a provocation. Deterrence occurs in response to monitoring. The potentially deterrent effect of monitoring is influenced by the individual's executive functions, through the self-control exercised." (Wikström 2005, p. 88).

Property Crimes Selectively Targeted at the Very Old: A Case for an R.A.T Perspective?

Financial abuse of the elderly is expected to increase in the near future because of the size of that population that is growing rapidly, the fact that they own a large scale of the wealth, the increase of vulnerability with old age and the sophistication of abusers to gain access to the older adults belongings and property (Kemp and Mosqueda 2005). While in general, the risk of being victimized declines in older age (according to police crime statistics but also to victim self-reports; see. Chivite-Matthews and Maggs 2002; Rand and Catalano 2007; Rennison and Rand 2003), some fields of crime show a different age-victimization pattern. Among these offences is a group of property crimes whose common characteristic is deception of the victim. These include deception burglary, larceny-by-trick and different fraudulent offenses. Offenders select victims because of characteristics they associate with very old age—being weak, being slow, being easy to deceive, living alone. Perpetrators pretend trustworthiness by posing as relatives (via telephone) or craftsmen (at victims' doorstep), or they appeal to victims' readiness to help by pretending to be in a situation of distress and needing support. The general aim behind this is—of course—obtaining victims' support and gaining access to their homes.

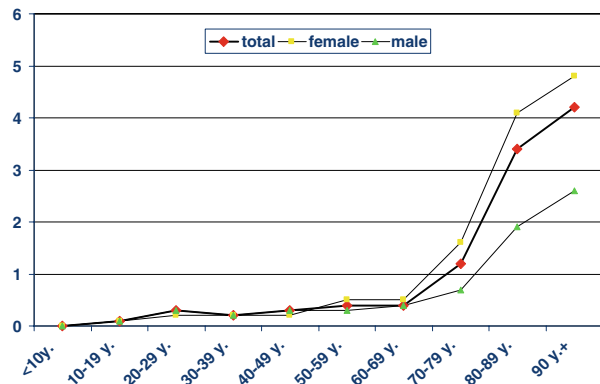
The infamous “it’s me scam” can be characterized as a prototypical example of elder fraud based on pretending a trust relationship. Usually, offenders select female victims from phone registries according to their seemingly “old fashioned” first names. They call them, saying “It’s me!”, and then try to make the victim ascribe an identity to them (“Is that you, George?”). If the offender is successful at this stage, he usually describes some short-term financial squeeze and asks for help: In case the victim agrees to help and go to the bank to get the money, a second call informs her that “George” is unable to come in person (due to some previously unforeseeable event) but will send his friend “Jack” (who then comes and collects the money). German police (see Ludwig 2009) describes these scams as a highly organized type of crime. Offenders practice a strict partition of labour with one group doing the “phone work” and the other group making direct contact with the victim and “collecting” the money. These offences are targeted mainly at “fourth agers” (see Baltes 1998; Baltes and Smith 2003, for distinctions between third age and fourth age) living in private households and thus having control over their money, valuables and property.

Figure 1—based on data from the police of the German federal state of Bremen—shows the elevated risk for the very old and especially for very old women many of whom live alone and are thus especially “easy” victims (see Görden et al. 2009, for details of the study).

When taking a look at strategies of offenders selectively targeting older victims for fraudulent offences, it soon becomes clear that these strategies almost perfectly fit the access categories described by Felson (2002). Offenders pretend to belong to victims’ families. Offenders act as craftsmen or local authority staff—having to perform some type of duty in the selected victim’s home. Offenders make victims believe they have crossed their path accidentally—for example wanting to visit a neighbour, finding that he has gone out, so wanting to leave a note for him and now needing paper and pen.

However, there is one important difference to the original formulation by Felson. Whereas research has repeatedly shown that—for crime in general—there is considerable overlap and similarity between offenders and victims—both being disproportionately male, young, unmarried, of low social status, and living in urban areas (cf. Deadman and MacDonald 2004; Fattah 2000; Gottfredson 1984; Hough

Fig. 1 Victims of deception burglary / larceny-by-trick per 1.000 inhabitants of respective age group per year. (Based on police data; German federal state of Bremen, Jan 2004–May 2006)

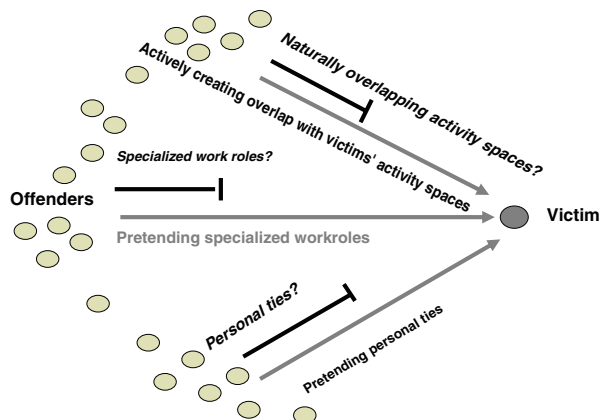


1986; Spalek 2006; Sparks et al. 1977)—the “naturally occurring overlap” in sociodemographic variables and lifestyle features is small when young men intend to victimize individuals from a much older (and predominantly female) population. Offenders selectively targeting older victims react to this challenge by actively creating such overlap or by pretending personal ties or a specialized work role. Figure 2 illustrates these strategies.

Concepts used by Routine Activity Theory can obviously be applied to frauds and scams targeted at old and very old people. In this field of financial crime, offenders’ underlying motives—easily acquiring money and possessions—are usually plain and simple. RAT, as a theory of events, not motives, coincides with this segment of elder abuse fairly well.

Even if it is more shocking because it looks more organised, exploitation by strangers (sometimes pretending not to be strangers) is not the only type of financial exploitation that older people succumb to. Material and financial offences are also committed by family members or significant non-kin, nurses or other direct practitioners, legal guardians and other persons close to the victim (and not merely pretending to be close). Material and financial abuse has been very well documented. This can be explained by the fact that it surfaced as the second most widespread form of abuse in several studies (the first place being occupied by neglect or psychological abuse; see Biggs et al. 2009; Setterlund et al. 2007; Rabiner et al. 2004). Only one case out of 25 would be reported (National Center on Elder Abuse 2005). Kemp and Liao (2006) have presented a typology of people susceptible of being exploiters of older adults. There is the opportunistic who finds out that he can take advantage of an older adult, the family member who exploits the vulnerability of an older one and finally, the third type is the professional scam artist. While in individual cases, offenders’ reasons for acting may be more complex than those of strangers (e.g. a nursing aide’s perceived unfair payment or the feeling of having been the disadvantaged child all one’s life, providing a reason and subjective justification for taking one’s “fair share” before it might be too late), still greed and striving for financial gain at the expense of another person can be considered to be the typical motives for financially exploiting older persons (see Alt and Wells 2004; Bond et al. 1999; Choi and Mayer 2000; Choi et al. 1999; Cohen 2002, 2008;

Fig. 2 Offender strategies when selectively targeting older victims for fraudulent offences



Hafemeister 2003; Penhale 2003; Reed 2005; Tueth 2000; Tung et al. 2007; Wilber and Reynolds 1996, on financial elder abuse).

Both in cases of stranger and of non-stranger offenders, Routine Activity Theory can prove useful to analyze what makes an older person a “suitable target” and how “capable guardians” could protect that person from “motivated offenders”.

Elder Abuse in Family Caregiving: Adding an Opportunity Perspective to a Strain-driven Field

Many studies on elder abuse done at home (versus in institutions) have put the focus on caregiving issues (see for example Fulmer et al. 2005; Hughes 1997; Williamson and Shaffer 2001; Yan and Tang 2004) This focus is so important that a certain number of studies do not even consider that abuse can occur in a dynamic where the senior is not dependent due to physical health or cognitive impairment. The burden theory to explain elder abuse in a caregiving situation has been well developed even if some recent study tend to show that burden is not the main factor to explain elder abuse done by a caregiver (Gainey and Payne 2006). Studies focus on the fact that caregivers do recognise their violent behaviour and try to explain it by the violent or aggressive behaviour of the senior (Coyne 2001); it would then be seen as a non appropriate answer to a violent behaviour, especially in cases of cognitive impairment (Miller et al. 2006). Nadien (2006) has identified four variables that interact in situations of abuse done by caregivers: the balance between power and dependency; personality or cognitive problems, contextual factors where the caregiving relation takes place, and sources of stress.

If the provision of care in the family is regarded from a control and opportunity perspective, it becomes evident that being a family caregiver or occupying a work role that permits close contact to an older person opens opportunities for crime and abuse. Caregiving can be burdensome and create multiple potential for conflict—so in SAT terminology we may have both opportunities and frictions in abundance.

From a criminological perspective, care in domestic settings represents “optimum opportunity structures” for a motivated offender (see Clarke 1997, for the concept of opportunity structure in criminology and crime prevention):

- Caregiving in the family virtually happens “behind closed doors” where the level of formal and informal social control is low.
- Potential victims are weak, vulnerable, and have little capacity to defend themselves.
- Offenders can act out of relationships of trust; this can make abuse and its concealment easy.
- Caregiving inevitably implies physical contact which in turn opens opportunities for abuse.
- In many cases, symptoms and effects of abuse are difficult to distinguish from symptoms and effects of illnesses and disabilities.
- The probability that an abused care recipient will report the abuse to the police or to any other helping institution is very low. This holds true especially for victims suffering from dementia or in other ways significantly limited in their communicative capabilities.

Opportunity may “make the thief”. But is it adequate to assume that opportunity also makes the abuser of an older care dependent family member or of a client served by a nurse? Here, a basic tension becomes evident. On the one hand, caregiving is an altruistic endeavour, aiming at helping and supporting people, preserving their autonomy and dignity even under conditions of severe and persistent physical and mental impairment. On the other hand, caregiving implies rich opportunities for abusing, exploiting and neglecting care recipients and for concealing these acts and omissions. It is necessary to analyze the connection between opportunities and elder abuse in more detail.

In a qualitative interview study, Görden et al. (2009) conducted interviews with family caregivers, care recipients, and nurses in 90 German family care arrangements. Based upon an analysis of cases of abuse and neglect encountered in the interview material, they propose an incident-centred typology. The field is structured by means of two characteristics.

- (1) Many elder abuse cases differ from most other incidents of harmful deviant behaviour by their *lack of an intention to harm on the offender's side*. Care recipients are being neglected because their caregivers do not know how to provide good care or because they lack the competence and the resources to do so. They suffer significant restraints of freedom because caregivers, caught in a conflict between the perceived need to protect the old person's safety and health on the one hand and to respect his or her autonomy on the other, decide unilaterally in favour of the former. Care recipients' compliance is enforced physically because caregivers perceive no other possibility. All these behaviours towards older care recipients can be considered as abuse or neglect, but none of them emerges primarily from an intention to do harm.
- (2) There are many cases of abuse where there is an intention to harm on the caregiver's side, but this intention is *linked to a specific situation* packed with emotions. Especially in dementia care, caregivers are confronted with care recipients' challenging behaviours. This may escalate into acts of verbal or physical abuse. At the very moment when these acts are performed, there is an intention or at least a readiness to hurt and harm. On the other hand, in the study by Görden et al. (2009) interviewees reported cases where obviously a trans-situational motive was present to do harm to a care recipient, to exploit his or her special vulnerability. Such incidents may be rare, but their severity makes them a top priority in elder abuse prevention and intervention.

Thus, the typology of elder abuse incidents proposed by Görden et al. (2009) starts from two basic questions: (1) Is there an intention to harm (on the offender's side)? (2) Is abuse and is an intention to harm linked to specific situational conditions, or do they exist across situations? Figure 3 presents the typology of *incidents* of elder abuse and neglect based on the application of these criteria.

In *types 1 and 2*, there is no intention at all to harm the care recipient. Still, abuse or neglect happen and the behaviour and its effects can be detrimental to the victim. Abuse or neglect may be trans-situational because the underlying problem (e.g. the caregiver's lack of knowledge about adequate pressure sore prevention or his belief that compliance with dental hygiene must—if necessary—be enforced physically) persists across situations. But there is no evil motivation, no intention to exploit care

Fig. 3 Typology of incidents of abuse and neglect of care recipients

		+	intention to harm?	-
abuse /intention trans-situational?	+	4. intention to harm + intent existing across situations	2. no intention to harm + abuse / neglect across situations	
	-	3. intention to harm + intent limited to situation	1. no intention to harm + abuse / neglect limited to situation	

recipients’ specific vulnerability. The probability of “re-offending” is high if the causes and triggers behind the problematic behaviours remain unchanged. Measures of prevention and intervention should focus upon support for caregivers, providing information, counselling, and training, and adapting the physical environment to the requirements of care. What has to be achieved here is to provide a “fundamentally benevolent” person with the resources needed to provide non-abusive and non-neglectful care. In cases of *type 3*, the respective behaviour (e.g. yelling at somebody, slapping somebody) is performed with the intent to cause harm to a care recipient. This intent is limited to a specific situation of emotional turmoil, provocation, or escalating conflict. The consequences for the victim may be severe. Offenders typically react with feelings of guilt, with excuses and sometimes with attempts to change the conditions that lead to the outburst. In some cases, these conditions can easily be changed (e.g. by providing knowledge about how to perform specific acts of care in a way that does not lead to physical resistance on the care recipients’ side, by training techniques of anger management, or by providing support from home-care services). In other cases, they are linked to features of the pre-caregiving relationship and require counselling going beyond mere transfer of knowledge and skills. Cases of *type 4* differ very much from all other types. There is an intention to cause harm to the care recipient that is persistent over time and across a range of situations. An example for this type can be found in the heir who neglects the care of a parent and thereby accepts hastening the care recipient’s death. Another example is the nurse from a home-care service who systematically abuses and humiliates an old woman suffering from dementia and living alone in a private home. Usually, the consequences of offences of this type are severe. The probability of re-offending is high; the offender will in most cases not seek help but try to hide from detection and prosecution. Whereas in types 1–3, offenders typically need support, information, training, and counselling, these “remedies” are mostly misplaced with regard to incidents of type 4. If a perpetrator systematically abuses

the fact that an old person is vulnerable, helpless, dependent, top priority has to be given to protection of the victim and separation of victim and offender. Criminal prosecution must be part of a comprehensive strategy against elder abuse and neglect.

Going back to the tension between the “generally altruistic” character of caregiving and its abundance of opportunities to abuse the care recipient, Gørgen et al. (2009) describe possible constellations bringing an intention to do harm into operation within a caregiving relationship:

1. A motivation to care is merely pretended by a caregiver who deliberately and purposively exploits an older person’s vulnerability.
2. Intentions to care and intentions to harm coexist and are targeted at different spheres. A caregiver may honestly want to care for an older person while at the same time trying to get a hold on that person’s property (e.g. as an heir competing with possible fellow heirs).
3. Intentions to harm develop over time in the frame of a “genuine caregiving relationship”. What once started as help, support and care, guided by the wish to make a person’s life worth living in spite of serious health problems and functional limitations may turn into something quite different, i.e. into a failed caregiving relationship where the wish to do that person good is wholly or partially replaced by the wish to hurt the care recipient, to retaliate for some real or felt past injustice or provocation.
4. A caregiver holds contradictory or ambivalent attitudes toward caregiving as an activity or towards the care recipient as a person. In spousal caregiving, the caregiver may experience a mixture of love, compassion, pride (of one’s achievements as a caregiver), disappointment, frustration, and anger. He or she may want to provide good care and preserve the other person’s wellbeing—and at the same time be full of anger and aggression because the care recipient verbally abused him or her for many years or had repeatedly been unfaithful. Thus, the caregiving motive is transformed by these negative perceptions, attitudes and emotions (see Lüscher 2005, on ambivalence, especially in intergenerational relations).
5. Finally, a person’s motivation to provide good care may temporarily be set aside due to situational factors. This is certainly the most frequent type of intentions to harm existing in the frame of caregiving relationships. Multiple stressors of caregiving, challenging behaviour of care recipients (especially those suffering from dementia) may lead to situations where a caregiver deviates from his predominant stance (and corresponding behaviour) towards a person in need of care and acts abusively or in a neglectful manner.

Coming back to the concepts used and offered by RAT and SAT, the question arises to what extent these theoretical models can be useful to understand abuse by family caregivers. In the terminology of *Routine Activity Theory*, abuse in domestic caregiving can be conceptualized as a *crime of specialized access* where offenders act either out of personal ties or from a specific professional role. With regard to RAT’s crime triangle, it is evident that care recipients in domestic settings (but also in institutions) can be regarded as *suitable targets* for abuse. This does not only apply to property offences and violent crime but also to sexual abuse. *Capable guardians* against an attempted act of abuse by a motivated offender are clearly

absent in many cases of domestic caregiving. However, regarding caregivers as possible *motivated offenders*, the applicability of this RAT concept seems less clear. Contrary to many other aspects of everyday life, the perception of opportunities as such and the intention to make use of opportunities cannot be taken for granted in family (or professional) caregiving. We have pointed to the tension between caregiving's general underlying motive and its pervasive "offender-friendly" opportunity structure and to the conditions under which the altruistic motive may give way to more deviant ones.

Thus, a need for theories and concepts which integrate individual perceptions and choices becomes evident. Wikström's *Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation* can offer some concepts that are useful for an analysis of elder abuse in caregiving relationships. This refers to the concept of *moral perception* implying that the perception of "objectively existing opportunities" is a highly individualized process. Whereas in public spaces, this may be of limited relevance since sooner or later somebody perceiving the opportunity (to steal something, for example) will come across, things are different in domestic dyadic caregiving relationships. Wikström's concept of *moral choice* is of equal importance to analyze and understand elder abuse in caregiving, pointing at the fact that not every perceived opportunity is taken. The concepts of opportunity leading to temptation and frictions resulting in provocation are directly applicable to caregiving. Picking up SAT terminology, domestic and institutional settings may be understood as "moral contexts".

The application of SAT concepts to abuse of care recipients may have implications for elder abuse prevention. While prevention has been mainly focused towards the general public or seniors few programs have been designed for potential abusers. Some programs targeting domestic caregiving abuse place the focus on control of anger (Campbell and Browne 2002) or problem solving, stress reduction, better use of resources in the community (Scogin et al. 1989). Based on the model suggested by Wikström, programs could place emphasis on the reduction of frictions and possible temptations in domestic and institutional settings. Conceptualizing institutional settings as moral contexts directs attention in the direction of reducing the possibility of transgressions by clear guidelines, monitoring and sanctioning. Several studies have shown that elder abuse in institutions needs to be framed by clear rules and the certitude that abuse will be declared and punished (McDonald et al. accepted, to be published 2010). There is also a need of control done by an outsider from the institution such as "surprise visits" on a regular basis. The time when unions were negotiating the departure of the employee without any trace in his employee's file should be over (Beaulieu 1994). Standards, rules, and guidelines also touch upon the individual perception of situations as opportunities by decreasing the status of abusive or neglectful acts as viable action alternatives.

Conclusions

Concepts from criminology and the sociology of deviance can enhance our understanding of elder abuse by pointing at the importance of situational and opportunity factors. However, there is no comprehensive "criminological theory of elder abuse" (and—given the width of the field—there will probably never be a

unitary theory of elder abuse). Rather, criminological concepts can meaningfully be applied to domains of elder abuse and linked with concepts from other disciplines.

While elder abuse research has from its beginnings taken up thoughts that are familiar to the strain tradition in criminology and in the sociology of deviance, a more control and opportunity centred perspective has widely been lacking. This paper argues that criminological approaches are useful for understanding incidents of abuse (and neglect) performed knowingly, deliberately, and with an intention to harm or to seek one's own advantage at the expense of others. *Routine Activity Theory* and the *Situational Action Theory of Crime Causation* are both limited to actions that have at least some degree of intentionality. The opportunity perspective in RAT is immediately relevant for property offences selectively targeted at the old and the very old. It implies that abuse prevention in this field can proceed mainly via opportunity blocking. The analysis has shown that opportunity is a relevant factor for abuse in professional and family caregiving as well. But here, this perspective has to be supplemented by further setting and person factors and their interaction. SAT with its notions of friction, moral context, monitoring and sanctioning may contribute to an understanding of inter- and intrapersonal behavioural variance in similar settings. It may help to explain why—by all we know—caregiving implies elements of danger for the care recipient but “objectively existing opportunities” often are not taken.

Strengthening the opportunity component in elder abuse theorizing does not imply giving up the strain perspective that has been dominant in elder abuse research for so long. It can be regarded as an enhancement to our understanding of abuse, recognizing that—as in any social domain—opportunities to act at one's own advantage will often be taken and that care dependent older people offer rich opportunities for this.

In a way, elder abuse can be regarded as “a deviant type of deviance”. Its profile is characterized by very old victims (whereas most crime victims are younger), female victims (whereas most crime victims are male), a significant proportion of incidents happening “without criminal intent”, and perfect opportunity structures existing for considerable periods of time without anybody taking the opportunity. Thus, there is a mutual promise in the connection between elder abuse research and criminological theorizing. The elder abuse field can benefit from criminological concepts in getting a more accurate picture of opportunities and the conditions under which these opportunities will probably be taken (or not taken). At the same time, elder abuse represents a challenge to criminological theorizing in deviating from its still very much youth- and male-centred prototypical images of crime and deviance. Application of theories of crime and deviance to this field can be viewed as a test of concepts and theoretical assumptions regarding their appropriateness and applicability to norm-violating behaviour in general and not just to young men's prototypical types of crime and deviance.

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