



Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles

Elder Abuse: Whose Problem is it?

REFERENCE

Cohen-Lithwick, M. (2003). Elder Abuse: Whose Problem is it? *Intervention*, 119, 24-34.

TEXT TYPE

Format: Scientific article

Content: Littérature review

DISCUSSED THEMES

Extent of the phenomenon, emergence of the social problem, forms of abuse in the community and in residential settings, risk factors, vulnerabilities, concept of gender, profile of the abused person, authors of the abuse, consequences, obstacles to reporting, explanatory theories, laws, burden and stress, cultural aspects and ageism.

GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This article aims firstly to present the state of the social construct of the problematic of elder abuse and its influence on our actions. The purpose of this article is also to show how professionals in the health network have put forward this issue and how the media and the research community have allowed to better define it.

PROBLEM

Elder abuse is a social problem that is still little known. In Canada and in the United States, 4% of seniors are victims of abuse. The main factor which influences the understanding of this phenomenon is the perception of the elderly as frail and vulnerable people who are in need of protection.

METHODOLOGY

This item does not have a methodology section.

RESULTS

Elder abuse has emerged as a social problem in the 80's in North America. Professionals and the media then drew a portrait of seniors as vulnerable and dependent beings, which undoubtedly influences the way the problematic of elder abuse is treated. Although family problems are, in many cases, the cause of abuse, the vulnerability of the older person continues to be put forth as an important factor. The reaction of seniors may also influence the response in an abusive situation, for example, in case of denial of service. In a feminist analysis of the problem, abuse is often related to the imbalance of power, where the woman has a lower status. This approach, however, is the target of much criticism. The social construction of the problematic of elder abuse is greatly influenced by the perceptions we have of the elderly and the one they have of themselves. Ageism may result in inadequate services being provided to seniors and in the belief, on their part, that they are not entitled to better treatment. Moreover, ageism and the sense of powerlessness of some seniors are also factors that explain why the elderly are not the key supporters of their rights or the principal activists to counter abuse.

DISCUSSION

The discussion is integrated to the results section above.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the problem of elder abuse has been constructed on the basis of several complex links. There is therefore no single explanation for the phenomenon nor is there a miracle solution to end it. The facts alone cannot produce change in the social response to abuse inflicted on seniors. This response is the result of interactions between knowledge and what society considers acceptable. Practitioners in the helping professions and researchers contribute greatly to influence these perceptions. However, a consensus definition would be difficult to achieve, because the understanding of the phenomenon varies according to culture, age, gender, decision-makers in place, practitioners involved and the seniors themselves, who are experiencing abuse.

AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The author suggests focusing on the solutions to consider according to the different constructs of the problem. She maintains that we must take the time to analyze the problem in all its complexity to find solutions.

DRAFTING DATE

May 08, 2014

