

Assessing Caregiver Burden and Stress

Fact Sheet
Elder Abuse
June 2008

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is any form of mistreatment that results in harm or loss to an elder. As awareness about elder abuse increases nationwide, its presence is also on the rise in Indian Country.

Traditionally, American Indian elders have held a place of honor for their wisdom, experience and cultural knowledge. Unfortunately, this is changing in some communities.

The majority of American Indian elders are cared for in their homes by family, friends or other caregivers. It is important to assess the burden on these caregivers since studies have shown that living with someone else (a caregiver or a friend) may increase the chances for abuse to occur.

Screen Elders for abuse and be aware of the various types:

- Financial Exploitation
- Neglect and Self-Neglect
- Psychological Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Spousal Abuse

Source: Lantz, Melinda S., M.D., Abuse and Neglect of the Older Adult: What Can the Physician Do? *Clinical Geriatrics*, Vol. 11, No. 3, March 2003, pp. 18-22.

Sample Questions to Informally Assess Caregiver Burden and Stress

Basic ADLs include: dressing, eating, continence, toileting, transferring and walking.

Instrumental ADLs include: medication management, shopping, meal preparation, transportation, home finances, telephone, and use of home appliances.

The caregiver would insert their elder's name

into the following questions.

What basic activities of daily living (ADLs) do you assist or perform completely for ___?

What IADLs do you assist or perform completely for _____?

How many hours per week are you with ___?

If you are away, who provides or could provide the care for _____?

How many hours per week are you able to do things for yourself (exercise, beauty shop, own doctor appointments)?

What strategies do you use when _____

- repeats the same question daily?
- accuses you of doing something you didn't do?
- wanders?
- gets angry?
- is verbally abusive?
- is physically abusive?

If you are currently employed,

- Are things going okay at work?
- Have you had to cut back work hours?
- Are you caring for other family members (child, parent, in-law)?

What other family stressors are you currently experiencing?

Are you having difficulty finding information about dementia?


- Do you use the Internet?
- Have you contacted the regional Alzheimer's Association near you?

Are you maintaining your prior spiritual connections?

Do you have a confidant?

If there were a support group near you, would you attend?

How do you find inner strength?



Sample assessment questions and types of interventions are both taken from *Annals of Long Term Care*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Jan. 2006, p. 37-38.

Interventions for Caregiver Burden

1. Education targeting disease and coping strategies
2. Respite care in the home for several hours a week or extended periods
3. Pharmacologic patient therapy such as the following:
 - Cognitive enhancers
 - Neuroleptics
 - Anticonvulsants
 - Antidepressants
 - Anti-anxiolytics
4. Traditional healing methods and herbal remedies

For a list of resources available for professionals and caregivers, see the *Referral Resources* fact sheet also available from NMGEC and NICOA.

Family Stressors

- Stress, especially associated with sudden shift to caregiving role and dependency
- Inadequate preparation and support for caregiver role
- Caregiver perceptions of powerlessness and hopelessness
- Lack of knowledge/training about proper care and aging issues
- Lack of coordination of elder care within extended family
- Economic stressors
- Caregiver personal problems and obligations

Additional Resources

New Mexico Geriatric Education Center

The UNM New Mexico Geriatric Education Center (NMGEC) is dedicated to improving the health care of American Indian elders through the education and training of health care providers. See NMGEC website for complete list of elder abuse fact sheets.

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National Indian Council on Aging

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) strives to improve health and social services for American Indian and Alaska Native Elders nationwide, including providing education, awareness and advocacy about elder abuse. See "Publications" on website for more elder abuse resources and fact sheets.

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