

**TITLE** - Holding Abusers Accountable: An Elder Abuse Forensic Center Increases Criminal Prosecution of Financial Exploitation

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## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

**Purpose:** To examine the effectiveness of adding the services of an elder abuse forensic center to Adult Protective Services (APS) to increase prosecution in cases of elder financial exploitation, compared with usual APS services. This study found that a multi-disciplinary team supports increased prosecution of financial exploitation cases in Los Angeles County, California.

**Methodology:** As a comparison study (N=476), enhanced cases were matched using a pool of 33,650 APS clients, aged 65 and older. Matches also included: race/ethnicity, location, number of abuse types, and the abuse types (physical, financial, neglect, isolation, self-neglect, and financial-neglect interaction). Prosecution was measured by: 1) cases submitted to district attorney (DA); 2) criminal charges filed; and 3) guilt established by plea or conviction. Average age of the victims was 82 years; two-thirds were female (67%), and the majority were non-Hispanic white (57%). Approximately one-fourth were African American (24%); a smaller percentage were Hispanic (15%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (5%). Less than half (46%) were referred only for financial exploitation.

**Results:** Forensic Center cases were significantly more likely to be submitted for DA review than were other APS cases: 22% (51 cases) vs. 3% (7 cases) ( $p < .001$ ). The strongest predictor in prosecution outcomes was Forensic Center intervention, which resulted in ten times greater odds of submission to the DA (OR=11.00, CI: 4.66-25.98). Once in the criminal justice system, the rates of filing and convictions were similar. The Forensic Center increased the odds of charges being filed by over seven times (OR=8.44, CI: 3.32-21.46) and the odds of establishing guilt by 8.5 times (OR=9.52, CI: 3.41-26.57).

## PRACTICE & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Rapid population aging implies that a growing number of older adults will be at risk of financial exploitation. In the present study, linking APS administrative data to DA records, findings suggest the Los Angeles County Elder Abuse Forensic Center is effective in bringing cases to the DA's attention for review, filing of criminal charges, and establishing abuser guilt (through pleas or conviction). As the nation wrestles with elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, the Elder Justice Act stands poised and ready for funding to expand the elder abuse forensic center initiative. Although a number of innovative programs are being developed around the country, it is important to recognize Connolly's (2010) observation that elder abuse remains largely hidden, leaving the problem "unrecognized, let alone investigated or prosecuted" (p. 38).

## FURTHER READING

Connolly, M. T. (2010). Where elder abuse and the justice system collide: Police power, *parens patriae*, and 12 recommendations. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 22, 37-93.

Jackson, S., & Hafemeister, T. L. (2010). *Financial abuse of elderly people vs. other forms of elder abuse: Assessing their dynamics, risk factors, and society's response* (Document No. 233613). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.



This research summary is part of a series sponsored by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA) joint Research Committee. The purpose of this research summary is to provide direct access to findings in order to enhance practice and clarify policy choices.

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