



**WEBINAR TITLE** - Assessing and strengthening elder abuse knowledge of pre-professionals: increasing exposure to elder abuse through university course content and field internships

**WEBINAR PRESENTERS** - Risa Breckman, Karl Pillemer & Christina Policastro

**SOURCE** - NAPSRC Research to Practice Webinar September 2014

### **SUMMARY OF RESEARCH**

The epidemic of elder abuse impacts one out of every 10 older adults. To meet the urgent needs of vulnerable older adults and elder abuse victims, we must build an informed, vigorous elder justice workforce to address the knowledge shortfalls, gaps in research and cultural practices of age discrimination. This includes knowledge about healthy and resilient aging as well as harmful manifestations of ageism like elder abuse. While elder abuse is generally recognized as a multifaceted problem that requires interdisciplinary prevention and intervention strategies, no studies or models of education and training have been initiated to assess and improve the level of awareness of pre-professional university students. Unfortunately, no studies have been conducted to assess the varying levels of knowledge that preprofessionals enrolled in university courses possess with regard to elder abuse. Dr. Policastro presented on a study conducted to address this gap. The study assessed the levels of elder abuse awareness among social work, nursing, health professions, and criminal justice students. Specific attention was given to determining whether there are differences in the amount of exposure to elder abuse literature across the disciplines. Survey data were collected and analyzed from 202 students enrolled in health and human sciences classes at a large university. Results show that none of the surveyed preprofessional groups, on average, reported knowing enough about elder abuse. Given the current findings, it is important that universities integrate more information on gerontological issues, especially elder abuse, into the university curriculum.

### **PRACTICE & POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

As an example of how universities can partner with researchers and practitioners to integrate more knowledge about elder abuse into the undergraduate curriculum, Risa Breckman and Dr. Karl Pillemer reported on an innovative internship program, the Risk and Resiliency Internship Program (RRIP). This program is designed for undergraduates to teach them to recognize and respond to harmful manifestations of ageism like elder abuse, and simultaneously to educate them on healthy aging and expose them to the wisdom and robust experience of older generations. This internship program links the NYC Elder Abuse Center, which serves older adult victims of abuse and their workers in an interdisciplinary practice setting, and The Legacy Project, which transforms the wisdom of older people into lessons that people of all ages can put into practice. The two programs launched RRIP in 2012 to bring the invaluable lessons of older adults to tomorrow's elder justice leaders. RRIP is specifically designed to educate undergraduate students about the value of older adults as well as the different types of abuse that can occur later in life. The resiliency side of the program brings interns and older adults together through use of The Legacy Project's structured interview method. Using this scripted protocol, interns will facilitate dialogues with older adults about their lives and experience, ultimately learn about the value of older adults as an inspiring source of wisdom. The risk part of the program focuses on the many angles of elder abuse, providing interns with the opportunity to learn how to respond to elder abuse first hand by attending NYCEAC trainings, case management meetings, and multidisciplinary case conferences. The RRIP interns also contribute to NYCEAC's social media initiatives and website and do field visits to organizations involved with elder abuse prevention and intervention. After the summer, RRIP interns conduct elder justice awareness activities back on the campus.

### **FURTHER READING**

*Policastro, C. & Payne, B. K. (2014). Assessing the level of elder abuse knowledge preprofessionals possess: Implications for the further development of university curriculum. Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect, 26(1), 12-30*



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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