

A Fresh Look at Fraud: Financial Exploitation among Elderly Population

Stacey A. Wood, Ph.D., Molly Mason Jones Professor of Psychology.

Scripps College, Claremont,
California



Professor Stacey A. Wood

- BA Middlebury College Bio-Psychology
- PhD Clinical Neuropsychology U Houston
- Board Certified in Geropsychology
- Fellowship UCLA Neuropsychology
- Court appointed expert



Sagrika Jawadi

- BA Scripps College Neuroscience
- Experience as Board Certified Autism Technician
- Associate of Dr. Wood



A FRESH LOOK AT FRAUD

**THEORETICAL AND
APPLIED PERSPECTIVES**

Edited by
**YANIV HANOCH
AND STACEY WOOD**



Goals of Lecture

Learning Objectives:

- Fresh Look at latest trends
- Updates on factors that increase susceptibility in older adults.
- Review literature on psychological impact of financial exploitation on elderly victims.
- Tools & Interventions

Key Definitions

- Financial Exploitation vs Fraud
- Elder Abuse
- Neglect (Self or other)
- Financial Abuse

Latest Trends in Fraud from FTC Feb 2022

- HUGE increase in scams originating on Social Media.
- 1:4 cases per FTC Sentinel
- Undelivered products on facebook/ Instagram
- Increase in scams across platforms: job boards, social media, linked in.....

Lost \$5.8 billion to fraud 2021.

> 70 % Increase over 2020

Imposter Scams

Online Shopping

Identity Theft

Vacation and Travel

Romance Scams

Scams involving crypto



Romance / Crypto Scams

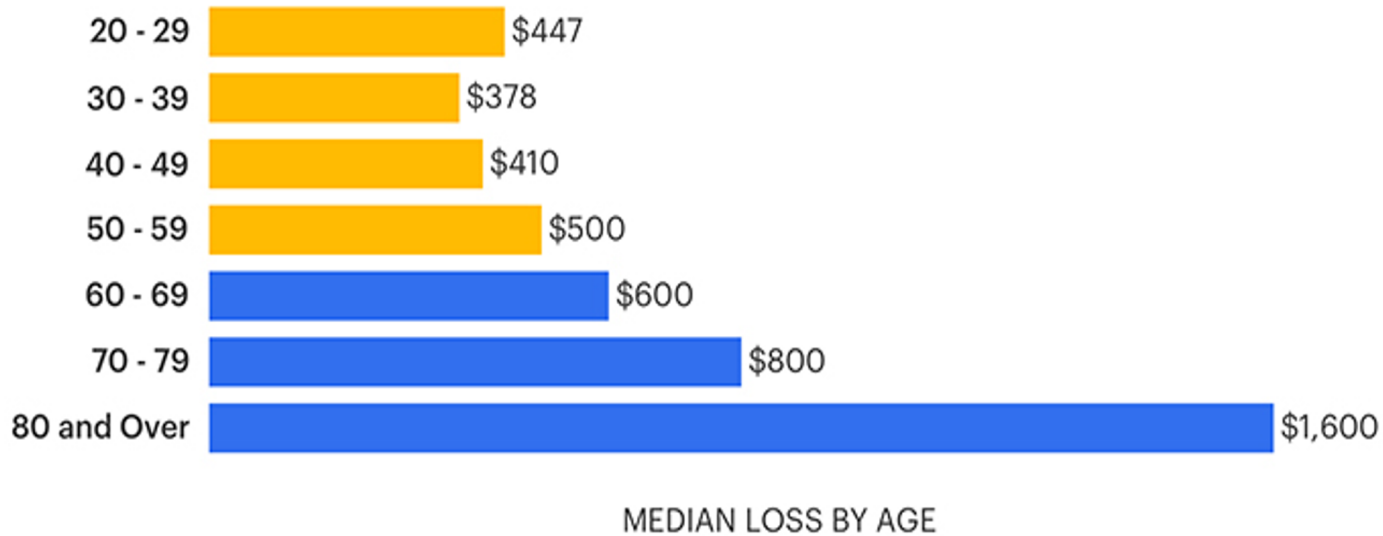
Case Example:

- Christine is 72 years young, active on social media.
- Approached on social media for a job opportunity.
- Scammer combines element of romance scam (works in London), with elements of investment scam-phony cryptocurrency investment scheme.
- Elaborate plot details and drama keep Christine on the hook.
- Lost \$600k.

Main Trends for Older Adults (2021)

2019 Median Individual Monetary Loss Reported By Age

Older adults reported higher median fraud losses than younger age groups.



Median losses calculated based on reports in each age group indicating a monetary loss of \$1 to \$999,999

2019 Top Fraud Types by Total Dollars Lost (Ages 60 and over)



REPORTED DOLLAR LOSS

Sentinel fraud types classified as "unspecified" are excluded. The Investment: Advice, Seminars, Investment: Art/Gems/Rare Coins, Investment: Stock/Commodity Futures Trading and Investment (Other) fraud types are grouped as "Investments" for this visualization.

Factors that Increase Risk For Financial Exploitation

Cognitive
Impairment /
MCI

Psychological
Factors

Exposure /
targeting

Health

Dependency

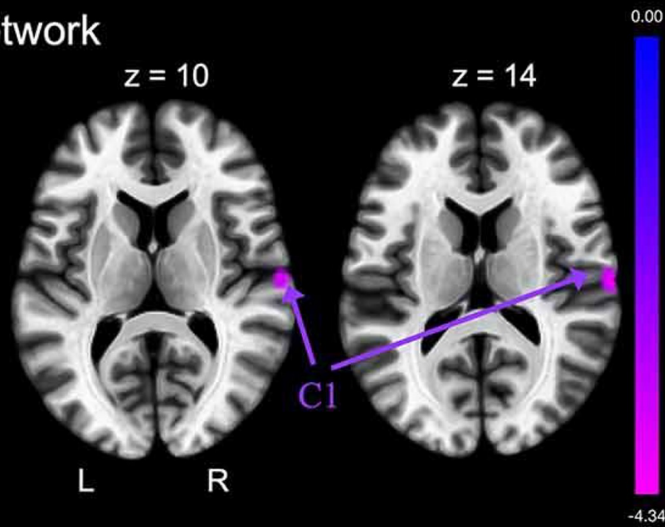
Isolation



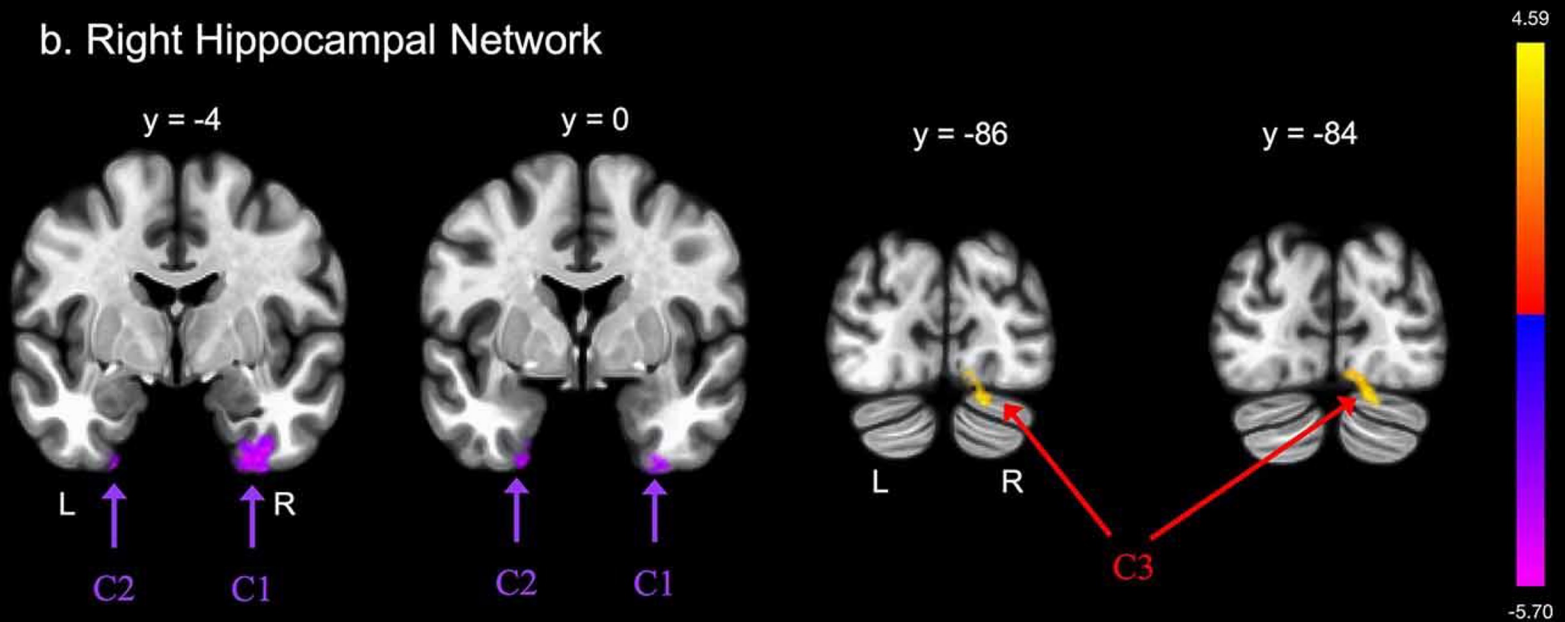
MCI / Early Dementia

- Declines in financial capacity and judgement may be EARLIEST symptoms of dementia, predating a diagnosis by years.
- Can be frustrating to all involved because these subtle changes can have a huge impact on vulnerability but neuropsychological testing may be inconclusive.
- Emerging evidence (Duke Han USC) that there are subtle changes on neuroimaging in non demented elderly people with risk for FE versus low risk.

a. Left Hippocampal Network



b. Right Hippocampal Network



Model of Vulnerability

- Psychological Vulnerability
 - Depression
 - Changes in social need fulfillment
 - Status
 - External Validation
 - Affection
 - Financial Satisfaction



Loneliness & Isolation

Older adults who report feeling lonely were more likely to be victims of any type of elder abuse including psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and caregiver neglect (Wang & Dong, 2018).

Older adults who experience loneliness and low levels of social support are much more likely to also report depression, which increases risk of elder abuse further.



Lichtenberg, 2013; Liu, Wood et al., 2017; Wood & Hengerer, 2022)

Psychological Impact of Financial Exploitation

- Consistent evidence that **the emotional costs of fraud are more distressing than economic costs** in survey research of fraud victims.
- Modic and Anderson (2015) survey of 10,000 participants assessed types of fraud victimization and impact.
 - Emotional impact as assessed by asking participants to self report perceived affective consequences.
 - Across fraud categories, emotional impact was rated as higher than financial impact.
 - Pyramid schemes had highest financial and emotional impact.

Fraud victims are Similar to Other Crime Victims

Button (2014). Survey by phone 800 fraud victims, 30 in person in depth interviews. Most common fraud investment, boiler room and identity.



Some findings:

- Increased reported stress
- Anger
- Lack of esteem
- Self blame
- Damage relationships
- Physical Health
- Mental health / increased risk of suicide
- Loss of confidence / change in financial behavior

Research from Ponzi Scheme Victims

Spalek (1999). Interviewed at length 25 of the 32,000 retirees who lost their pensions to Robert Maxwell using a mixed methods approach. Key themes were anxiety, anger, worse health, premature death, self blame, disillusionment, decreased trust in financial institutions, loss of sleep.

“Mrs. Riches had been burgled: when asked how that compared with the Maxwell scandal she answered:

‘No, it's nothing like it. That's (the burglary) a one-off thing that you don't think about much. I was shocked but I didn't think too much about it, I got on with my life. But I couldn't get on with my life once Maxwell came, because it was there, it was there everyday of our lives. It was haunting Jack and his distress was haunting me.’”

Research from Ponzi Scheme Victims continued

- Freshman (2012), conducted a survey of 172 Madoff victims. **She reported that the sudden and dramatic personal financial loss resulted in PTSD like symptomatology.**
- 10 months post event, 56 % of the sample met criteria for PTSD as a group using DSM-4 criteria.
- 61 % reported high levels of anxiety, 58 % reported high levels of depression and 34 % indicated health related issues.
- Over 90 % affirmed a loss of confidence in financial institutions.

Research Related to Physical Health and Importance of Financial Recovery.

- Zunzunegui et al (2017), conducted a survey of 188 individuals who were either victims of "preferred shares" and "foreign currency" mortgages in Spain using national health data.
- Individual who were victims of fraud had poorer health, more mental health issues, poorer sleep, and decreased quality of life that a comparable population matched for age.
- Those who had received financial compensation had better health and better quality of life than victims who remained uncompensated.
- **Financial exploitation is detrimental to health.**

Tools & Approach

-Social / Environmental
Factors

-Risk Considerations

-Financial Knowledge and
Skills

-Financial Vulnerability and
Undue Influence

-Psychological Vulnerability

Overall Approach continued

- Clinical Interview
 - Background
 - Education
 - Values
 - Meaning of financial security
 - Role money plays in life
- Diagnosis / Medical:
 - Health conditions
 - Health trajectory
- Cognitive Factors
 - Role of MCI
- Emotional / Psych Factors
 - Vulnerabilities
 - New Symptoms
 - Tests / approaches
- Functional
 - ADLS
 - IADLS
 - Sensory / hearing /vision



Financial Exploitation Vulnerability Assessment

- How worried are you about having enough money to pay for things?
 - How satisfied are you with your finances?
 - Who manages your money day-to-day?
 - How satisfied are you with this arrangement?
-
- <https://www.olderadultnestegg.com/for-older-adults/>



Financial Decision Tracker

- What Financial Decisions are you making or have you made?
- Was this your idea or did someone else suggest it or accompany you?
- What was the primary purpose of your decision?
- Who does it benefit? What are the risks?
- <https://www.olderadultnestegg.com/or-older-adults/>
- Created by Peter Lichtenberg

Oregon Referrals and Considerations

- Is it Self-Neglect?
- Oregon Department of Justice (Consumer Protection)
- Local LEA
- FTC.gov (If there is an ID Theft component)
- IC3.gov (If there is a computer component)
- OIG Postal Inspector Office (If there is a mail component)



Interventions

- Identify and address risk factors including psychological vulnerability AND financial Vulnerabilities BEFORE fraud happens.
- SAFE Program:
 - After Scam SAFE assists seniors with financial counseling, concrete steps to restore credit, deal with creditors, add fraud alerts, and provide other resources
- WISE: Support groups for chronic compliant scam victims.
- <https://www.olderadultnestegg.com/for-older-adults/safe-financial-coaching/>
- <https://www.wiseandhealthyaging.org/programs-services>

Elder Justice

A Resource Guide for Action



This Resource Guide was created by WISE & Healthy Aging,
and funded in part by the City and County of Los Angeles Area Agencies on Aging.



WISE
Healthy Aging



Literature Review

- Drentea and Reynolds (2015): Where does Debt Fit in the Stress Process Model?
- Bialowolski et al (2019): The impact of savings and credit on health behaviors
- Brown et al (2005): Debt and Distress: Evaluating the psychological costs of credit.
- Button et al (2014): Not a victimless crime: The impact of fraud on an individual victims and their families
- Cross et al (2016): The reporting experiences and support needs of victims of online fraud
- Sarria et al (2019): Financial Fraud, Mental Health, and Quality of Life: A Study on the Population of the City of Madrid, Spain
- Schneiderman et al (2005): Stress and Health: Physiological, Behavioral, and Biological Determinants
- Spalck (1999): Exploring the Impact of Financial Crime -- the Maxwell Pensioners
- Sweet et al (2013): The high price of debt: Household financial debt and its impact on mental and physical health
- Whitty and Buchanan (2015): The online dating romance scam: The psychological impact on victims
- Zunzunegui et al (2017): Financial fraud and health: The case of Spain
- Freshman (2012): Financial disaster as risk factor for PTSD
- McFarland and Bloom (1990): Victims of fraud: comparing victims of white collar and violent crime
- Goldstein et al (2010): Fraud Trauma Syndrome: The Victims of the Bernard Madoff Scandal
- Khan and Khan (2017): Chronic Stress Leads to Anxiety and Depression
- Kircanski et al (2018): Emotional Arousal May Increase Susceptibility to Fraud in Older and Younger Adults
- Modic and Anderson (2015): It's all Over but the Crying: The Emotional and Financial Impact of Internet Fraud
- Norris et al (2019): The Psychology of Internet Fraud Victimization: a Systematic Review
- Ross and Smith (2011): Risk Factors for Advance fee Fraud Victimization

Questions

