

A Comparison of the Perceptions of the Abuse of Older Adults Among You and Middle-Age Adults: Implications to Counseling

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of abuse with the older adult population. In addition, this article sought to examine the perceptions of the abuse of older adults among young and middle-age adults. Specifically, this study was concerned with the differences in the perceptions of adults regarding the physical abuse of older adults. Additionally, this study investigated the affects of the variables ethnicity, marital status, and religious affiliation on the perceptions of young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults.

A descriptive survey design method was employed in this study to collect and analyze the data. The 1999 Elder Abuse Attitudes and Behavioral Scale-Revised and the Walker Elder Abuse Demographic Data Profile Instrument were utilized in the study. The Test-retest reliability coefficients ranged from .45 to .69. The Alpha reliabilities for each subscale ranged from .91 to .93. There were three hundred (300) adults who participated in this study from universities in the Southern region of Texas. Descriptive data were computed on the participants by age, ethnicity, marital status, and religious affiliation. The statistical instrument that was utilized in this study to test the hypotheses was the One-Way Analysis of Variance. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 alpha level or better.

For a variety of reasons, the abuse and neglect of older adults continue to critically impact its victims' quality of life. According to Decalmer and Glendenning (1993), Johnson (1991), and Wolf and Pillemer (1989), the neglect and abuse of the elderly is not new. What is new is the attempt since the 1970s to find out why it happens.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to explore the phenomenon of the abuse of older adults. In addition, this article will examine the perceptions of the abuse of older adults. The term older adult is defined for this study as those individuals who are 60 years of age and older. In addition, the term young adult refers to those individuals who are 18 to 35 years of age. Further, the term, Middle-Age adults, refers to those individuals who are 35 to 59 years of age. This article seeks to examine the perceptions of the abuse of older adults among young and middle-age adults. Finally, this article will provide recommendations to the field of counselor education.

Prevalence of the Abuse of Older Adults

The prevalence of the abuse of older adults is rapidly increasing. The National Center on Elder Abuse (1998) reported that 3% of adults over the age of 60 in the United States are victims of elder abuse and neglect. Data from Canada estimate the incidence of elder mistreatment at 4% of the population (Hornick, McDonald, & Robertson, 1992). If that rate holds steady, by 2050 there will be nearly 2 million incidences annually in the United States. The mean age of those who have been abused is 76.5 years (Tatara, 1996). According to Welfel, Danzinger, and Santoro (2000), data from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services for 1998 illustrated how serious elder abuse can be: Ten percent of reports involved a life threatening situation, and 12 deaths were recorded in a single year.

Forms of Abuse in the Older Adult Population

There are many forms of abuse that affects older adults. According to Gray-Vickrey (2001), the four most common types of abuse are as follows:

1. Neglect, whether intentional or unintentional, accounts for 49% of substantiated elder abuse cases. Neglect typically occurs when a care giver fails to provide an older person with adequate food clothing, shelter, medical care, or assistance with activities of daily living.
2. Emotional abuse, the willful infliction of anguish through threats, intimidation, humiliation, and isolation, is involved in 35% of cases.
3. Financial abuse is the misuse of someone's property and resources by another person. Financial or material exploitation occurs in 30% of cases.
4. Physical abuse is the use of physical force that results in pain, impairment or bodily injury, accounts for 25% of substantiated elder abuse cases. Hitting, slapping, restraining, molesting, biting, burning, pushing, or pulling all qualify as physical abuse.

Pritchard (1996) identifies three types of elder abuse cases that are regularly seen by health care professionals:

1. Those where there is a history of incest (typically between mother and son).
2. Those where a husband sexually abuses his wife.
3. Those where older gay men are sexually abused in the community (p.29).

Methodology of the Study

A descriptive research study was conducted to examine the perceptions of young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults. This study involved the use of a simple random sample. The population for this study consisted of three-hundred (300) young and middle-age adults attending four-year public universities located in the southern region of Texas. The following independent variables were identified for this study: religious affiliation, marital status, and ethnicity. These independent variables were analyzed for their individual relationship and their combined effect on the dependent variables, which are the perceptions of the young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults. The participants completed the 1999 Elder Abuse Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions Scale-Revised (EAABIS-R). This instrument was developed and validated by Bert Hayslip. In addition, the Walker Elder Abuse Demographic Data Profile Instrument was utilized in this study. This instrument collected demographic data with respect to marital status, religious affiliation, and ethnicity. Further, the EAABIS-R was used to assess the perceptions of the abuse of older adults.

The One-Way Analysis of Variance statistical method was employed in this study. The following hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance or better:

- Ho₁: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults with respect to religious affiliation.
- Ho₂: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults as related to ethnicity.
- Ho₃: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of young and middle-age adults regarding the abuse of older adults with respect to marital status.

Results

Based on the statistical analysis, the following results were obtained:

1. The variable religious affiliation did not significantly affect the perceptions of adults regarding the abuse of older adults (see Table 1).
2. The variable ethnicity did not significantly affect the perceptions of adults regarding the abuse of older adults (see Table 2).
3. The variable marital status did not significantly affect the perceptions of adults regarding the abuse of older adults (see Table 3).

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Summary Table Regarding the Perceptions of
Young and Middle-age Adults Regarding the Abuse of Older Adults
with Respect to Religious Affiliation

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	P
Between Groups	1783.704	2	891.852	2.281	.104
Within Groups	116102.420	297	390.917		
Total	117886.124	299			

Table 2

Analysis of Variance Summary Table Regarding the Perceptions of
Young and Middle-age Adults Regarding the Abuse of Older Adults by Ethnicity

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	P
Between Groups	445.171	4	111.293	.280	.891
Within Groups	117440.950	295	398.105		
Total	117886.12	299			

Table 3

Analysis of Variance Summary Table Regarding the Perceptions of
Young and Middle-Age Adults Regarding the Abuse of Older Adults by Marital Status

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	P
Between Groups	401.015	2	200.507	.507	.603
Within Groups	117485.11	297	395.573		
Total	117886.12	299			

Concluding Remarks

The empirical data yielded from the article revealed that the variables ethnicity, marital status, and religious affiliation did not significantly affect the perceptions of adults regarding the abuse of older adults. In addition, the results of this study were not consistent with those of Child, Hayslip, Radika, and Reinburg (2000). The researchers found that middle-age and young adults perceived the abuse of older adults differently. One plausible explanation for the present findings might be that a large percentage of the respondents had not been exposed to older persons who had been abuses.

Recommendations to Counselor Education

The following recommendations should be considered by counselors and other human services professionals:

1. Counselors should be cognizant of what actually constitutes older adult abuse.
2. An understanding of what older adult abuse is will enable helping professionals, especially counselors, to detect when abusive acts are being committed against the older adult.

3. Counselors should be aware of various programs/agencies that assist older adults when they are being abused. A list of these programs should be provided made available (i.e. adult protective services).
4. Counselors and other human services professionals should develop a network of support to monitor the activities of the older adult when living with relatives. If a support mechanism is in place, there is a less likelihood that an older adult person will be abused.
5. Counselors and other human services professionals should be aware of factors that contribute to older adult abuse. An understanding of these factors can assist helping professionals in their efforts to minimize this type of abusive behavior.
6. Human services professionals, particularly counselors should have some understanding of the personality types of perpetrators of older adult abuse. Being aware of older adult abuse offender personality types will go a long way in controlling this phenomenon.
7. Finally, counselors should be aware of intervention programs that they can implement to prevent older adult abuse. Preventive services such as training in care giving and educational programs against abuse can change individuals and diminish the likelihood of older adult abuse.

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