




Elder abuse, mental health, and substance abuse: Data from a one-year UK study

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- Elder abuse: “A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, which occurs within any relationship (...) of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person” (WHO, 2018)
- Increasing need of study in the context of an aging population (United Nations, 2017)
- Most neglected type of interpersonal violence (Butchart & Mikton, 2014)
- Challenges faced:
 - Lack of reporting by victims, the rejection of services offered, and the scarcity of interventions with perpetrators (Burnes et al., 2017)

- **Mental health and substance abuse needs: risk factors for elder abuse in victims and perpetrators** (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013)
- **Only a few studies have looked at these needs in both elder abuse victims and perpetrators** (Conrad et al., 2019)
- **Little research on how these needs may impact victims' and perpetrators' engagement with elder abuse services** (e.g., Brownell et al., 2000)

- Investigate the presence of mental health and substance abuse needs in elder abuse victims and perpetrators in a UK sample
- Explore current engagement in relation to these needs
- Explore the potential impact of these needs on help-seeking behaviours in relation to elder abuse and on service engagement

Secondary analysis of enquiries (i.e., phone calls, emails) recorded in a UK charity helpline's database

THE DATA SOURCE

- Helpline run by volunteers and staff since **1997**
Supported by electronic database since **2017**
- Database includes a free text description for each enquiry



- Focus on all the enquiries recorded by the helpline in a year ($N = 2538$)
 - Period: **May 2017- May 2018**
- Case characteristics coded using a data collection guide (qualitative and quantitative data)
- Ethical approval by Royal Holloway, University of London
- Volunteer agreement with the charity Action on Elder Abuse

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- ✓ Case constitutes elder abuse (WHO, 2018)
- ✓ There is enough information about key variables:
 - Victim's gender
 - Abuse type(s)
 - Victim-perpetrator relationship
 - Enquirer identity (victim or non-victim reporter)

DATA COLLECTION TOOL: VARIABLES

Victims' and perpetrators' demographics

Type(s) of abuse perpetrated

Victim-perpetrator relationship

Victims' and perpetrators' mental health needs

Victims' and perpetrators' substance abuse needs

Current engagement with services regarding these needs
(services, reasons for lack of engagement)

DATA ANALYSES

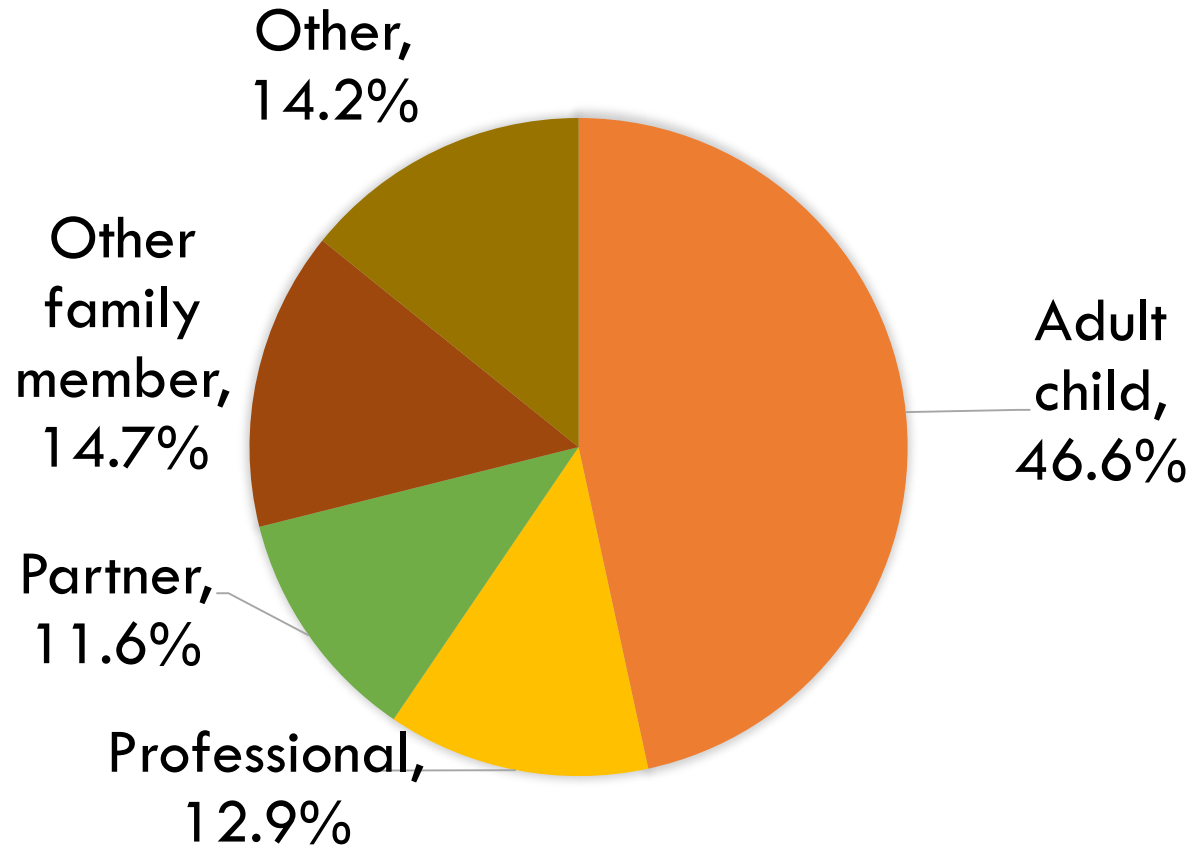
- Descriptive statistics
- Thematic analysis of enquiries' free texts to explore
 - The role of mental health and substance abuse needs in these cases:
 - Victims' help-seeking
 - Victims' and perpetrators' readiness to engage

The Sample

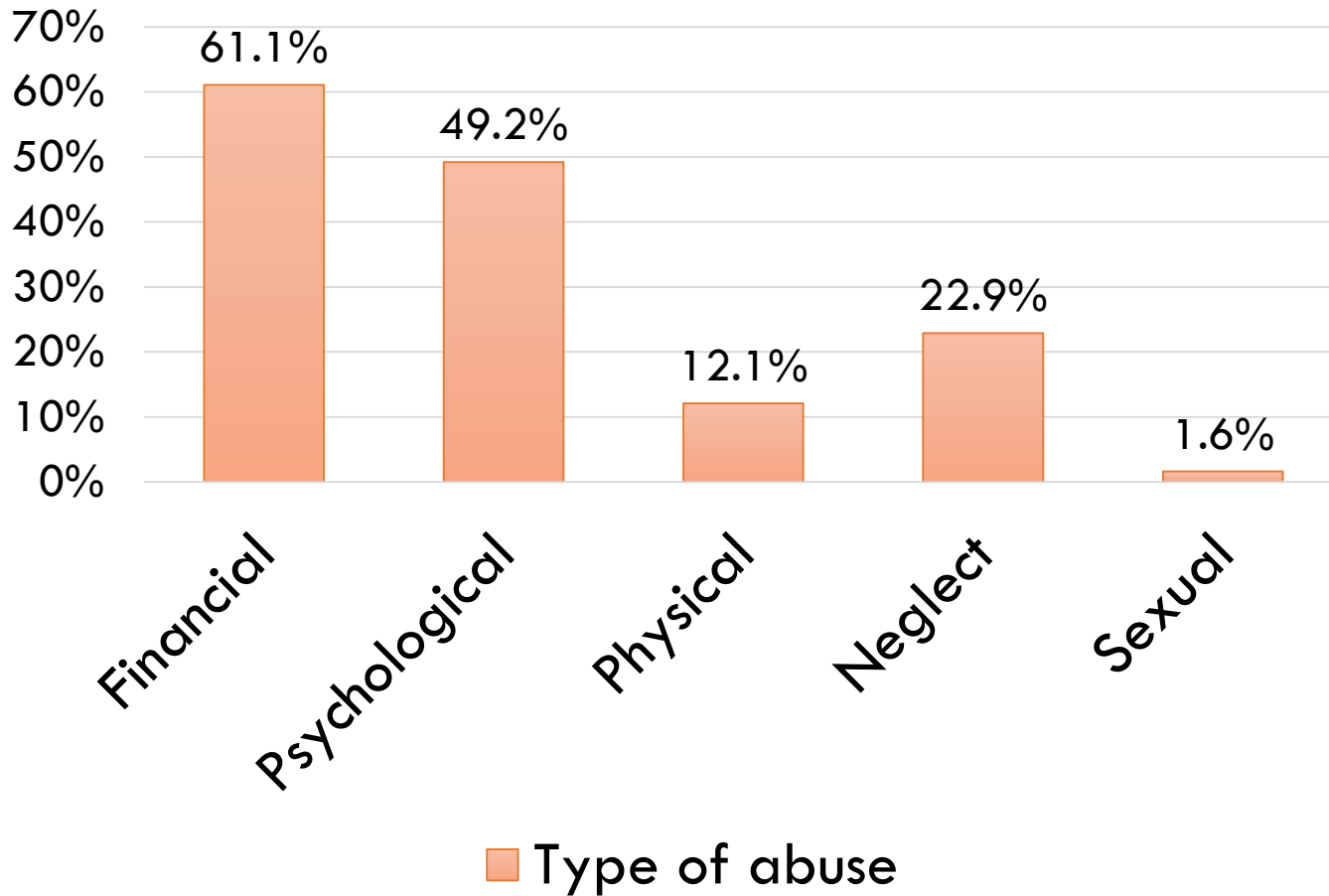


Variable	n	%	M	SD
Met inclusion criteria	1639	64.5		
>1 victim	114	6.9		
>1 perpetrator	197	12		
Primary victim's age			81.1	9.3
Primary perpetrator's age			51.9	17.9
Victim's gender: female	1099	67.1		
Perpetrator's gender: male (13.6% missing)	722	51.2		

RELATIONSHIP WITH VICTIM



The Sample



Mental Health and Substance Abuse Needs



Reported needs	VICTIMS		PERPETRATORS	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mental health needs	104	6.3	81	4.9
Mood	47	45.2	18	22.2
Unspecified	31	29.8	40	49.4
Psychotic disorder	12	11.5	6	7.4
Personality disorder	4	3.8	7	8.6
Substance abuse needs	12	0.7	90	5.5
Alcohol abuse	10	83.3	45	50
Drug use	2	16.7	49	54.4
Mental health and substance abuse needs	1	0.06	7	0.04

Engagement with Services



		VICTIMS (<i>n</i> = 115)		PERPETRATORS (<i>n</i> = 164)	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Service engagement	Yes	39	33.9	15	9.1
	No	14	12.2	13	7.9
	Unknown	62	53.9	136	83
Type of services	GP	10	25.6	1	6.7
	Hospital	9	23.1	1	6.7
	Local mental health team	5	12.8	4	26.7
	Care/nursing home	5	12.8	0	0
	Other	10	25.6	9	60

Reasons for Lack of Engagement



Reasons	VICTIMS (n = 14)		Reasons	PERPETRATORS (n = 13)	
	n	%		n	%
Perpetrator's behaviour/attitude	4	28.6	Refuses to seek or accept help (reason unknown)	6	46.2
Services discontinued	3	21.4	Thinks they are "beyond help"	1	7.7
Past negative experience	2	14.3	Past negative experience	1	7.7
			Others minimize need for help	1	7.7
			Professional advised stopping medication	1	7.7

- 265 Mental Health and/or Substance Abuse (MHSA) cases
 - Perpetrator only ($n = 150$)
 - Victim only ($n = 101$)
 - Perpetrator and victim ($n = 14$)
- MHSA needs as cause of all (or part) of the abuse (perpetrators sample) ($n = 44$)
 - “That’s where the money goes (drugs)”
- MHSA needs as consequence of abuse ($n = 30$) or vulnerability ($n = 11$) (victims sample)
 - “The abuse (...) is causing her to feel very depressed”
 - “(The perpetrator) is taking the money using the excuse that the victim is mentally unwell”

- Victims' help-seeking:
 - Barrier:
 - Own needs making it harder to seek help ($n = 4$)
 - "There was nothing she could have done due to mental health"
 - Feeling sorry for the perpetrators (because of their needs) ($n = 4$)
 - Facilitator: deterioration ($n = 3$), help for perpetrator ($n = 5$)
 - "I need help in getting him (perpetrator) support"
- Others getting involved:
 - Perpetrators' MHSA as cause of suspicion ($n = 4$)
- Service engagement:
 - Victims' and/or perpetrators' general mistrust ($n = 9$)

- Lower reporting than in previous studies: nature of the sample
- Complex needs reported that need to be targeted during intervention
- Availability of services for perpetrators important to engage victims
- Substance abuse and mental health needs may need to be understood:
 - As elder abuse risk factors
 - In terms of their impact on service engagement

LIMITATIONS

- Cases of abuse not substantiated
- Self-reported mental health and substance abuse needs
- Relies on helpline staff's recording
- Biased sample

NEXT STEPS

- Quantitative analysis to understand how mental health and substance abuse relate to:
 - Abuse characteristics
 - Help-seeking behaviour (e.g., barriers, facilitators)
- Further research to understand how these needs may be targeted during intervention

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Thank you! Merci!

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