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Public Perceptions of Elder Abuse: A literature review



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**Public Perceptions of Elder Abuse:
A literature review**

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Executive summary

There has been growing concern about the abuse of older people in recent years. A report by the National Council on Ageing and Older People in 1998 first drew attention to the extent of this problem in Ireland and made recommendations on how to address the issue. Since then, the government have committed to responding to these recommendations, particularly around increasing public awareness, identifying and preventing elder abuse. Recognising incidences of abuse and knowing how to respond accordingly can have significant consequences on how this problem is dealt with and what interventions are put in place. Therefore it is important to examine how the public view elder abuse and what they perceive to constitute elder abuse, and to examine the impact of cultural values and norms on how elder abuse is defined and understood. It is these perceptions that will determine what behaviours are deemed acceptable or unacceptable towards older people. Therefore, the primary purpose of this review is to bring together and examine the existing knowledge base of national and international research on public perceptions of elder abuse.

A systematic literature search was conducted using three main databases: CINAHL, PubMed and the Social Science Index. The review period was January 2000 to September 2009 and only incorporated literature published in the English language.

A review of the literature highlighted gaps in knowledge and awareness around elder abuse and revealed some disparity relating to how elder abuse is defined and understood by the public. Findings revealed the importance of defining elder abuse within the cultural context in which it occurs. General agreement was found on how the different types of elder abuse are perceived, with neglect, psychological and physical abuse being the commonly known forms of abuse. Sexual and financial abuse were the least mentioned forms of abuse. Mixed perceptions regarding the extent of elder abuse and the settings (institutional or community) in which elder abuse is most likely to occur are also reported. Several factors emerged which may contribute to how elder abuse is perceived. In particular, people's experiences surrounding elder abuse, the age and gender of the perceiver, the health of the older person, the characteristics of the perceived victim as well as cultural beliefs and values, all contribute to how elder abuse is perceived. Recommendations have been made for practice, education and research.

1. Introduction

While family violence and child abuse have received considerable attention in the past, only in the last decade has elder abuse emerged as an area for concern. As the population of older people expands, there is increasing urgency to deal with and address the issues of abuse and mistreatment of older people. Since the publication of a report on elder abuse by the National Council on Ageing and Older People, the Irish Government have committed to developing and implementing strategies to identify, prevent and manage elder abuse. However, there have been reported differences and ongoing debates globally in what is considered to constitute elder abuse, creating problems for prevention, identification and management of such a sensitive issue. Therefore, this literature review aims to examine how the public perceives elder abuse. Firstly, difficulties relating to the definition of elder abuse and disclosure of such incidents are discussed. Secondly, the overall aim, objectives and search strategy adopted in this review are detailed. Thirdly, findings from the review are presented, reporting the public's perceptions of elder abuse. More specifically, findings report the public's awareness of elder abuse, perceived typology and prevalence of elder abuse, help seeking patterns, perceived location for elder abuse and the factors that influence how the public perceive elder abuse. The limitations of this review are also identified. Based on the findings, recommendations are made for practice, education and research.

2. Elder abuse

Attention was first turned to the mistreatment of older people in the 1970s when 'granny battering' or 'granny bashing' was first described (Baker 1977; Donovan 2004). Abuse of older people was only really brought to the forefront in Ireland with the publication of the report *Abuse, Neglect and Mistreatment of Older People* (O' Loughlin & Duggan 1998) by the National Council on Ageing and Older People. This report set out a number of recommendations to help to address the problem of elder abuse. As a result of this report, a Working Group on Elder Abuse was established in 1999. This group was set up to advise the Department of Health and Children on how to address the problem of abuse of older people. In 2002, this group published a report entitled *Protecting Our Future* highlighting how elder abuse was being dealt with and approached in Ireland. Similar patterns of recognising and dealing with the problem of elder abuse have also been identified in other countries. For example, in the UK, only in the 1990s did the government show any indication that elder abuse was an area of concern which

needed to be dealt with (Department of Health 1993). Tackling this issue continues to be a focus of concern today (Department of Health 2000).

Several events have drawn attention to the area of elder abuse in the last number of years. Media attention such as that given to an undercover investigation in Leas Cross, highlighted the mistreatment of older people in a nursing home in Dublin. Featuring this investigation as a television documentary dramatically increased public attention around elder abuse in Ireland. More recently, awareness of abuse has increased as a result of recent child abuse disclosures. Publications such as the Ryan Report (2009) which investigated child abuse in Irish institutions has also helped to increase awareness around abuse in general. These occurrences, together with governmental commitment, have the potential to increase public awareness of elder abuse.

2.1 Definitional issues

One difficulty repeatedly identified in previous studies exploring public perceptions, has been issues surrounding the definition of 'elder abuse' which has sometimes been described synonymously with 'elder mistreatment' (Swagerty *et al.* 1999). Since the concept of elder abuse emerged, definitions have proved a major issue (Wolf 1988). There has been no universally accepted definition (McCreadie 1996; Malley-Morrison *et al.* 2006) and existing definitions have been criticised as being either too broad, inconsistent and ambiguous (Podnieks *et al.* 1990). Consequently, the area of elder abuse is not only one of a sensitive nature but the lack of an agreed and acceptable definition makes comparing research findings much more challenging and limiting because of these inconsistencies, the nebulous terminology used and the lack of a uniform definition (William & Griffins 1991; Ogg & Munn-Giddings 1993; Penhale 1999; Ryan *et al.* 2001). Thus, a vaguely defined phenomena or problem remains making it difficult for policy makers and for the formulation of interventions. As Hudson and Carlson (1998 p.78) stated, "a classification system that includes precise and distinct definitions of categorical concepts is essential to progress in the field".

Definitions of elder abuse are further confused by the fact that official or professional definitions frequently differ from the public's perception of elder abuse, as definitions tend to be sometimes adapted by different cultural groups (Gebotys *et al.* 1992; Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008). This has led a number of researchers to acknowledge the need to incorporate public perspectives as well as professional perspectives in classifying and defining elder abuse (Pillemer & Suitor

1988a; Hudson 1991). Other researchers have claimed that several factors have to be taken into account when defining elder abuse. For example, when defining incidents as abusive, some call for the nationality of the person involved, circumstantial factors and the nature of the abusive act to be taken into consideration (Moon and Williams 1993).

Several definitions of elder abuse have been proposed. The World Health Organisation (2002) adopted the definition employed by the UK's Action on Elder Abuse (1995), which defines elder abuse as:

A single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action occurring with any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.

This definition incorporates elements of 'frequency' and 'intensity'. Consistent with this, members of the public agreed that even just one instance of yelling, swearing, slapping or hitting constituted elder abuse, indicating that this behaviour need only occur once to be then determined as abuse (Hudson *et al.* 2000). The actual intensity of the abusive behaviour may not be considered as relevant.

The Working Group on Elder Abuse in Ireland also adopted the Action on Elder Abuse definition with the addition "*or violates their human and civil rights*" (HSE 2002). However, this definition is not without its criticisms as it does not incorporate self-neglect or abuse by strangers and tends to place emphasis on physical actions (Health Service Executive 2002). Others have claimed that it is too difficult to interpret (Mowlam *et al.* 2007). Although the definition tends to concentrate on actions by people, it does also incorporate incidences which may be considered neglectful and a consequence of inappropriate care. Consistent with this definition, abuse has been deemed inclusive of any of the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial or material abuse, neglect or acts of omission or discriminatory abuse.

In comparison, the UK government document entitled *No Secrets* (2000) uses a more widely drawn definition, defining elder abuse as "*A violation of an individual's civil or human rights by any other person or persons*" (Department of Health 2000, p.9). This definition does not recognise a 'trust' relationship between the abuser and the abused and also does not incorporate self-neglect.

This incongruence with definitions, particularly at governmental level is also likely to impact on how elder abuse is perceived and defined by the general public.

2.2 A social taboo

Despite elder abuse being a long-standing societal problem, it has been a phenomenon that has been deemed a 'social taboo' kept behind closed doors, within familial boundaries and institutions and shielded away from public scrutiny (Bennett *et al.* 1997). People generally struggle to discuss such a sensitive issue and to report incidences of elder mistreatment (Penhale 2008). It is often an unmentionable topic, particularly for older people as they frequently depend on relatives for care and support as they age, making them even more vulnerable (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a). Underreporting by older people, families, carers and the general public also occurs because of a lack of awareness and understanding of abusive behaviours.

Previous studies have predominately focused on professionals' perceptions of elder abuse (Haribson & Morrow 1998), and less so on public perspectives. To deal adequately with elder abuse and to develop interventions that are effective, it is important to ascertain the public's perceptions of the kinds of behaviours and treatment which they believe constitute abuse and mistreatment of older people. What might be considered abusive in one culture may be very different as to what constitutes abusive behaviour in another (Tatara 1999). Significant differences between various ethnic groups have been found in what is considered elder abuse. Furthermore, greater tolerance has been shown for certain forms of elder abuse in certain cultures (Moon & Williams 1993). Much of the existing literature reports on surveys which have examined elder abuse in terms of cultural differences. Although surveys conducted about sensitive issues can be taxing, they are a means of eliciting the public's views about such private matters (Ryan *et al.* 2001).

Public perceptions of elder abuse may affect judgement on what is considered acceptable behaviour towards and treatment of older people. Thus, these perceptions can also have implications for the prevention and identification of elder abuse. Increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of abusive incidents towards older people could enable people to recognise abusive situations and to react more appropriately and promptly (Werner *et al.* 2005). This review will provide an insight into how elder abuse is defined and perceived by the public.

3. Overall aim

The overall aim of this review is to bring together the existing research base on knowledge of public perceptions of elder abuse.

3.1 Objectives

The main objectives are:

- To examine the literature pertaining to the public's perceptions, knowledge and understanding of elder abuse;
- To identify from the literature different types of elder abuse and the nature it takes as perceived by the public.
- To identify from the literature what factors influence people's perceptions of elder abuse.

4. Search strategy

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken using the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed and the Social Science Index databases. Searches were carried out on these databases using a combination of the following keywords: public perceptions; public views; perceptions; public opinions; public attitudes; public awareness; public understanding; public knowledge; public experience; perspectives; elder abuse; elder mistreatment; elder violence; abuse of older people; and abuse of the elderly.

The search period was confined to articles published between 1st January 2000 and 30th September 2009 and those in the English language. These searches yielded a total of 180 journal articles, of which 20 were deemed relevant to this literature review based on abstracts alone. Ten of these articles reported the perceptions of public cohorts of people pertaining to various aspects of elder abuse (see Appendix 1 for a summary of these studies). However, the remaining articles reported the views and perceptions of specific groups such as faith communities, care workers, families, older people and professionals (e.g. dentists, physicians and police). These were excluded so that the review would be as representative as possible of the perceptions of the general public. Further relevant literature was retrieved from reference lists and related books. Other grey literature and governmental reports were also searched.

5. Findings

5.1 Overview

Seven core areas emerged relating to the public's perceptions of elder abuse. These included: 1) the need to understand public perceptions of elder abuse within a cultural context; 2) awareness of elder abuse; 3) typology of elder abuse; 4) prevalence of elder abuse; 5) help seeking patterns; 6) the location in which elder abuse is perceived to occur; and finally 7) the factors that influence public perceptions of elder abuse (experience, perceivers' characteristics, health of the older person, characteristics of the victim and cultural values and beliefs).

5.2 The cultural context

Abuse and neglect are frequently socially defined; therefore, due to cultural diversity, the meaning and understanding of abusive behaviours must be understood within the social context in which they occur (even where values and customs have been firmly embedded in the social structure). Much of the literature has been culturally sensitive determining public perceptions of elder abuse within that culture, and examining the differences in what is considered abusive or non-abusive behaviour (Malley-Morrison *et al.* 2006). Culturally normative interpersonal behaviours acceptable in one group may not be deemed acceptable in another cultural group.

Diversity in cultural values has implications for the definition of elder abuse. For example, Moon (2000) noted that definitions of elder abuse among Asian and Hispanic older people have a tendency to be narrow and limited. These cultures tend to define elder abuse within the context of family relations, where cultural beliefs deem family responsible for the elderly. Consequently, the definitions of elder abuse do not address abuse carried out by caregivers or those outside of the family setting. This may leave elders in these cultural groups more vulnerable, as elder abuse may not be recognised when it occurs outside the family home.

In certain cultures older people have held traditional roles where they are viewed as the primary source of knowledge and wisdom. In Japan, Confucian ideals of filial piety have been traditionally held where it is believed that the elderly should be cared for and worshipped (Tsukada *et al.* 2001). In return for a parent's sacrifice and support for their children's educational achievements and career achievements, it is expected that the child provides care for the parents when they are older. A failure to do this is considered socially unacceptable,

disrespectful and abusive (Arai 2006). Furthermore, conflict between wives and mothers-in-law in such cultures are beginning to emerge often resulting in elder abuse (Arai 2006). However, these intergenerational trends are changing (Yan *et al.* 2002). More recently, the elderly are becoming more reliant on their spouses for care and support than on their children which would have traditionally been the case (Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Wealth 2004 cited in Arai 2006).

In contrast, older people are perceived differently in Brazil. Younger people tend to be more valued (Bezerra-Flanders & Clarke 2006) and Brazilian societal views towards older people are prejudicial and discriminatory (Machado *et al.* 2001). For example, people over the age of 60 years are underrepresented in the media and are seldom ever seen on TV, in the newspaper or in magazines. Views of undervaluing older people are also evident in the Brazilian's government's approach to service provision for older people where programmes and services for this population 'are slowly emerging and are doing so with very little governmental financial support' (Bezerra-Flanders & Clark 2006 p.70).

Some cultures have deeply held societal values about the family where there is a widely held understanding that domestic affairs should never become public knowledge (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). Family matters are kept private, as any family discord made public is considered shameful (Soeda & Araki 1999). This is also reflective of Irish culture where, in small communities in particular, family matters and disputes tend to be kept within the family circle. This may impact on estimates of the prevalence of elder abuse as people are reluctant to disclose such information and may wish to continue maintaining good public face and a sense of normality. Such a protective stance creates challenges for research in this area as people are reluctant to disclose familial circumstances and familial problems.

As cultural values and beliefs play a significant role in how elder abuse is perceived, defined and interpreted, this review will pay particular attention to the cultural norms and beliefs of the country where the studies cited were undertaken.

5.3 Awareness of elder abuse

According to McCreadie *et al.* (1998), the public's awareness of elder abuse has been limited. Recently, a nationally representative survey was commissioned by the Health Service Executive (HSE) with the aim to "*ascertain the level of*

awareness and understanding of elder abuse in Ireland among the general public" (HSE 2009, p.11). This survey sampled the perceptions and attitudes of nearly a thousand adults through telephone interviewing. Contrary to McCreadie *et al.*'s (1998) assertion, the findings concluded, "*there appears to be high levels of awareness of the issue of elder abuse among the population*" (HSE 2009, p. 64), with one in three in the general public having a good understanding of the concept of elder abuse. The term 'elder abuse' was mainly understood to mean the 'general abuse of older people', followed by neglect and physical abuse/attacks of older people (HSE 2009, p.50). However, some 13% of the public had no knowledge whatsoever as to what the term 'elder abuse' meant (HSE 2009).

Despite elder abuse also receiving increasing attention in the UK, the House of Commons Health Select Committee (2004) acknowledged that there was little known about elder abuse and that there was little information available on the area itself as to how this issue was perceived by the general public. Since this acknowledgement, a survey reported that nearly two in every five people had never heard of the term 'elder abuse' (Help the Aged, n.d. '*Abuse of older people overlooked*' cited in Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, only 2% of the public perceived the prevention of elder abuse as a national priority. Prevention and management of child abuse, cancer and cruelty to animals were perceived to be more important (Help the Aged 2006, '*Abuse of older people overlooked*' n.d. cited in Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006).

An Israeli study of 169 laypeople examined emotional reactions to abuse using vignettes and found that when participants were asked whether they had ever heard about elder abuse, nearly half of this convenience sample (46%) reported that they had heard of this form of abuse, and that their main source for this knowledge was the media (Werner *et al.* 2005). On the other hand, a Brazilian study (n=70) revealed that 44% of their sample reported that they either were not aware of any abusive acts towards the elderly or were not at ease talking about elder abuse (Bezerra-Flanders & Clarke 2006). Despite this, 41% were able to provide examples of mild abuse, 41% in the case of moderate abuse and 48% in the case of extreme elder abuse. However, these findings should be considered with caution as this study was based on a relatively small sample.

Awareness of elder abuse has been reportedly much higher in other countries. For example, a study in the US examined public perceptions of elder abuse

through interviews and found that 90% of participants (n= 944) had previously heard of 'elder abuse' (Hudson *et al.* 2000). However, this study was based on a sample of middle-aged to elderly adults (40 years to 93 years), which may help to explain this higher percentage, as it might be expected that there would be more awareness among this age group.

5.4 Typology of elder abuse

Penhale (2008) pointed out that, despite the fact that there are inconsistencies with the definition of elder abuse, there is in fact general consensus in relation to the types of elder abuse that occur. These mainly include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, financial abuse, psychological abuse and emotional abuse (Penhale 2008). When interpreting findings, it is important to note that respondents may know what constitutes elder abuse without having heard the term itself (Tsukada *et al.* 2001).

When participants in a survey in Ireland of nearly a thousand people were asked 'what is meant by the term elder abuse?' nearly a third of participants (29%) understood elder abuse to mean the 'general abuse of older people' (HSE 2009, p.50). This was followed by 'not looking after themselves properly' (19%), which was then followed by 'physical abuse/attacks (14%)' (HSE 2009, p.50). When asked to name types of elder abuse, physical abuse and neglect were the most commonly known forms; both types were reported by 40% of the sample (HSE 2009). These findings are consistent with the fact that more visual and obvious forms of abuse such as physical abuse and neglect are generally more easily recognisable types of abuse than other forms which may not be as evident such as psychological/mental abuse. Psychological abuse was mentioned by less than a third of participants (HSE 2009). This form of abuse has been noted to be particularly difficult to define, as it entails no direct behavioural criteria (Johnson 1995). Overall, 14% of the sample (n=950) reported that they did not know any type of elder abuse (HSE 2009).

A sample of 70 Brazilian participants (aged 16 to 57 years) cited 'acts of omission' such as neglect more than other forms of abuse and considered this form more serious than 'acts of commission' such as hitting or slapping (Bezerra-Flanders & Clark 2006). Therefore, as would be expected, the most commonly cited form of abuse in this study was 'psychological neglect', followed by 'neglect/abandonment' (Bezerra-Flanders & Clark 2006). These types of abuse were also the most frequently mentioned in a study in Italy with a convenience

sample of 53 participants (Daskalopoulos & Borrelli 2006). An English study also reported similar findings (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006). A convenience sample (n= 50), aged between 20 and 73 years were asked to provide examples of elder abuse. Once again, elder abuse was conceptualised more as 'acts of omission' compared to 'acts of commission'. For example, most participants made reference to neglect (both physical and psychological), abandonment and deprivation (from food and sleep) (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006). The authors suggested that the family unit may be perceived as the primary source of care and support for older people for their psychological and physical care needs (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a).

Elder abuse has also been conceptualised as involving physical actions as well as psychological abuse. Other than neglect, the second most frequently noted type of extreme abuse by an English sample was examples of physical abuse such as slapping, hitting and pushing (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a). This was then followed by forms of psychological abuse, which was mentioned as a form of moderate as well as mild abuse. Examples included mental cruelty as well as verbal and emotional abuse (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a). This might indicate more tolerance for psychological abuse than physical abuse among the English public. Similarly, a Japanese study also found greater tolerance for psychological abuse than physical abuse (Arai 2006). This study, conducted with a convenience sample of 146 participants (aged 19-60 years), emphasised physical aggression (such as kicking and hitting) as an example of extreme elder abuse. This was followed by neglect, which is consistent with Confucian ideals of filial piety. This is embedded within deep cultural beliefs whereby the family should take responsibility for older parents, and care for and look after them. Failure to do so is perceived as unacceptable or abusive. Psychological abuse (such as blaming and psychological aggression) was provided as another example of extreme elder abuse (Arai 2006). Psychological abuse, particularly psychological neglect was one of the most commonly reported forms of mild elder abuse (Arai 2006). Arai (2006) concluded that Japanese adults are more aware of physical abuse and aggression due to high levels of violence in the media. Alternatively, physical violence may be a perceived consequence of the stress and pressure placed on families and the expectation that they take responsibility for the older parent (Arai 2006).

In the US, neglect was generally not perceived as being a form of abuse. Elder abuse was reported as meaning 'hurting or harming elders and/or causing them

pain; not treating elders right; treating them in a disrespectful or degrading way; being mean or cruel; taking advantage of elders; and hitting or beating them” (Hudson *et al.* 2000, p.109). These exemplars of elder abuse are indicative of psychological, physical, social or financial abuse (Hudson *et al.* 2000).

In the UK, those who reported that they were aware of instances of elder abuse, cited ‘poor personal care’ as the most frequently identified type (51%), followed by ‘not being fed properly’ (22%) and instances of ‘disrespect and humiliation’ (21%) (Hussein *et al.* 2007). The most commonly cited form of elder abuse deemed abusive at an extreme level in Turkey was neglect, followed by psychological abuse (Yalcinkaya *et al.* 2006). Psychological aggression was commonly mentioned as mild and moderate forms of abuse. These findings are consistent with a Portuguese study where neglect followed by physical aggression (44% and 31% respectively) were perceived as most severe forms of elder abuse (Mercurio & Nyborn 2006). In fact, neglect was overall the most commonly perceived form of elder abuse and was given as an example of elder abuse at all levels (mild, moderate and severe). These findings concur with the social obligation in Turkey and Portugal where adult children are expected to take care and look after their elderly parents and not rely on social services for help and support. Findings also suggest that any physical violence towards an older person would be perceived at the very high end of abuse and that placing an older family member in a home would be criticised (Mercurio & Nyborn 2006). The relationship with an older person is seen as one of respect and obedience where, in particular, Turkish elders are turned to for wisdom (Yalcinkaya *et al.* 2006).

Rinsky and Malley-Morrison (2006), using a convenience sample, examined the perceptions of 21 Russians towards elder abuse. Respondents reported psychological aggression (e.g. “cursing at an older parent”), followed by physical aggression (“hitting, slapping and pushing”) and neglect (e.g. not feeding an older or disabled parent”) amongst the most commonly perceived abusive behaviours towards older people (Rinsky & Malley-Morrison 2006, p.133). From these, physical aggression such as “hitting elderly parents” was perceived as the most extreme form of elder abuse followed by psychological aggression (Rinsky & Malley-Morrison 2006). Neglect was perceived as abusive at all levels (mild, moderate and extreme) (Rinsky & Malley-Morrison 2006). Examples included “not interested in parent’s life”; “the adult does not respond to calls for help by an older individual”; “the adult won’t feed the older individual”; or the adult “seldom calls the older person and ignores the relationship” (Rinsky & Malley-Morrison

2006, p.135). The authors noted that surprisingly, sexual abuse was not reported, and only a small number mentioned financial abuse, despite the economic hardship of many older people in this country (Rinsky & Malley-Morrison 2006). Similarly, participants were least likely to mention forms of financial abuse as examples of economic exploitation in England (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a), despite the fact that this form of abuse is known to occur among older people (House of Commons 2004). Less than one in five (18%) in the sample in Ireland mentioned financial abuse and/or discrimination as other types of elder abuse, while sexual abuse was only cited by 7% of the sample (HSE 2009). Few, if any, of the participants mentioned financial abuse or sexual abuse as a form of elder abuse in the Portuguese study, however this perhaps could be because examples of elder abuse were based on adult children's treatment towards their elderly parents and it would be assumed that this type of behaviour would not occur in this type of familial relationship (Mercurio & Nyborn 2006). Financial abuse was only mentioned by a small number of participants in a Turkish convenience sample, however finances are deemed a very private matter in this country, therefore participants may have been reluctant to talk about this (Yalcinkaya *et al.* 2006).

Overall, neglect, physical and psychological abuse were amongst the most commonly known forms of elder abuse. The perceived severity of these types of abuse varied according to the cultural beliefs of the group. Financial and sexual abuse were the least cited forms of abuse suggesting that the public are either not familiar with these or do not consider these abusive when the elderly are concerned.

5.4 Prevalence of elder abuse

The extent of elder abuse as perceived by the general public has been reported by several studies. The special EUROBAROMETER (2007) examined European Union citizen's perceived treatment, neglect and abuse of dependent elderly people and found that nearly half (47%) of Europeans are of the belief that occurrences of elder abuse are fairly or very widespread. Citizens of Romania perceived these occurrences of poor treatment to be at the highest (86%) while citizens of Cyprus (17%) and Sweden (19%) perceived lower levels of poor treatment of the dependent elderly. Hussein *et al.* (2007) revealed from a sample of a thousand respondents that over half (55%) believed that there was 'a great deal' of elder abuse. Those over 65 years of age that were more inclined to believe that there was 'very little' elder abuse activity in the UK (Hussein *et al.*

2007). These findings concur with a study carried out by the HSE in Ireland (n=950) where 40% of the sample believed that abuse of the elderly was 'quite' widespread, while 15% stated that they believed elder abuse was 'very widespread'. The remaining sample (44%) reported that they believed that elder abuse was either 'not very' (34%) or 'not at all' (5%) widespread in Ireland or reported that they did not know (5%) the extent of elder abuse (HSE 2009). In comparison, one in four reported that they were unsure or did not know the prevalence of elder abuse in the UK (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Participants in Northern Ireland perceived greater levels of elder abuse (79%) than participants in other regions of the UK (Hussein *et al.* 2007). In Ireland those under 35 years had more knowledge and awareness of elder abuse than those over 35 years and believed elder abuse to be more widespread, suggesting that younger people may be more aware of the possibility of elder abuse occurring (HSE 2009).

5.6 Help seeking patterns

Knowledge of who to approach and where to go to get help and report instances of elder abuse is essential in tackling this problem area. Recognising a situation as abusive has been found to correlate with increased help-seeking behaviours (Moon & Williams 1993). In Ireland the public indicated that they would in the first instance seek help and report incidences of elder abuse to the Gardai Siochana (the Irish police) (HSE 2009). However, the UK public were more inclined to approach social services or paid care staff if they encountered elder abuse (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Only a third of the sample in Ireland reported that they would approach the health service in the case of elder abuse (HSE 2009). This may indicate differences in response systems and support structures between countries when targeting elder abuse. However, seeking help and support in relation to elder abuse is deemed not that straight forward. A Hong Kong study revealed that when it came to reporting cases of elder abuse, the public perceived getting help from social workers as difficult (39%) and asserted that reporting abuse was troublesome (31%) (Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, approaching the police was deemed unhelpful by a third of the sample with the same percentage of respondents claiming that they would not know where to go to make such a report (Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008).

Moon and Williams (1993) proposed that tolerance levels of elder abuse might be a significant predictor of the intentions of a person to seek help. A study involving three ethnic groups revealed that older Korean women were found to have higher tolerance levels for elder abuse than Caucasian or African-American women and

were therefore less likely to seek help than the two other groups (Moon & Williams 1993). Yuk-chung *et al.* (2008) also examined whether public perceptions and reporting of abuse differed dependent on who the victim was and the type of abuse. Findings suggested that the public would be more inclined to report 'elder abuse' than 'child abuse' or 'spousal abuse', however the percentage of respondents who considered certain behaviours towards the elderly as abusive (74%) was greater than the percentage of people who were prepared to report such abusive behaviours (59%). These findings may signify the public's lack of confidence and discomfort around reporting cases of elder abuse. Similarly, as part of a larger survey on international perspectives on family violence and abuse (Malley-Morrison 2004), findings reported that over half of the participants (57%) failed to even answer the set of questions on elder abuse. This might be indicative of discomfort levels, resistance to the concept of elder abuse or lack of understanding as to what elder abuse means (Yalcinkaya *et al.* 2006).

5.7 Perceived location of elder abuse

Definitions of elder abuse frequently fail to take into account the context in which the abuse occurs. It should be acknowledged that elder abuse can take place in any context. According to the Department of Health (DoH) in the UK:

It may occur when a vulnerable adult lives alone or with a relative, it may also occur within nursing, residential or day care settings, in hospitals, custodial situations, support services into people's own homes, and other places previously assumed safe, or in public places

(Department of Health 2000, paragraph 2.14)

Based on a national representative sample of 245 people in the UK who claimed that they knew of an older person who had been abused, over half of the sample (53%) reported that this abuse occurred in a care home (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Just under half of the sample (48%) reported that it occurred in a hospital setting while 29% reported that it occurred in the person's own home (Hussein *et al.* 2007). The special EUROBAROMETER (2007) found that people were most likely to believe that it was staff in care homes (32%) and staff working with an older person in their own home (30%) who were most likely to mistreat elderly people. The charity *Help the Aged* reported that over half of the respondents in their study perceived elder abuse to occur outside the family home. Perpetrators of elder abuse were also most commonly perceived to be professional carers. Although two thirds of this sample reported being aware of abusive incidents, these were reportedly outside their own families (*Help the Aged, 'Abuse of older people overlooked'* n.d. cited in Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006). This indicates that

inconsistencies exist with reporting from within one's own family and thus, increases the likelihood that elder abuse may go undetected and underreported.

Discrepancies also exist in the literature. As pointed out by Hussein *et al.* (2007), despite neglect and mistreatment being perceived by the public to occur more in care homes and hospitals, the research literature tends to indicate that abuse and neglect occurs more pervasively in a person's own home than in a care home or hospital setting (House of Commons 2004). Furthermore, older people who stay in hospital settings have reported relatively high levels of satisfaction (Healthcare Commission 2006). This disparity may be attributable to the powerful influence of the media on public perceptions which may report on and focus on certain instances of abuse and mistreatment in institutions compared to incidences in community settings. Alternatively, this discrepancy may also reflect the dearth of studies that have been conducted around elder abuse in care settings in comparison to those conducted within the community (Pillemer & Finkelhor 1988b; Biggs *et al.* 2009).

5.8 Factors that influence public perceptions of elder abuse

A number of factors play a pertinent role in how elder abuse is perceived and defined by the public. A paper by the National Centre for the Protection of Older People identified negative perceptions and ageist attitudes as factors that play a role in predisposing older people to elder abuse (NCPOP 2009). This review identified the following factors which influence people's perceptions of elder abuse: people's experiences relating to elder abuse, characteristics of the perceiver such as their age and gender, the deteriorating health of the older person, characteristics of the perceived victim and cultural values and beliefs

5.8.1 Experiences relating to elder abuse

People's experiences surrounding elder abuse can impact on how they perceive elder abuse. For example, having known an older person who had experienced mistreatment made respondents from a UK survey much more confident in their responses pertaining to their perceptions of elder abuse than those who did not know of an older person who had been abused (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Those who reported not having known an older person who had suffered abuse were five times more likely to believe that there was a 'great deal' of elder abuse (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Zaidi *et al.* (1989) also found that those who had actually experienced abusive backgrounds themselves were more tolerant of violent abusive behaviours than those who had no such experience.

Therefore, having direct experience of people who have suffered elder abuse increases one's confidence and knowledge around the area. However, experience of elder abuse first hand may also increase a person's tolerance for such behaviours.

5.8.2 Characteristics of the perceiver

Perceptions of elder abuse are often dependent on the characteristics of the perceiver (Childs *et al.* 2000). The age and gender of the perceiver have been found to influence perceptions of elder abuse.

5.8.2.1 Age

A person's age may play a role in influencing how elder abuse is perceived. In a study in Ireland, those aged less than 35 years had greater awareness of elder abuse (HSE 2009). This finding is consistent with a Japanese study which found that the older the person, the less likely they are to be familiar with elder abuse (Tsukada *et al.* 2001). Contrary to this, a UK study reported that those aged 55 years or older were actually more likely to be knowledgeable about 'elder abuse', however they were also significantly more likely to believe that there was 'very little' incidences of neglect or abuse of older people (Hussein *et al.* 2007). Furthermore, this survey found that people, in this mid-life age group (55-64 years) were more inclined to have concerns over abuse and mistreatment of older people than older people themselves (Hussein *et al.* 2007). There was a greater tendency for this age group (55-64 years) to know an older person who had been abused or mistreated (35%) in comparison to the younger age group (18%) or those aged over 65 years of age (21%) (Hussein *et al.* 2007). These findings are consistent with an Israeli study where older people were found to be less worried about being a victim of elder abuse compared to reports by younger respondents (Neikrug 2003). A review of the literature indicates that older people might not be aware of elder abuse, or necessarily concerned with elder abuse. Alternatively, older people may not perceive elder abuse as a problem as they may feel confident in managing and dealing with abuse themselves if they were faced with such an incident.

Age may also impact on how different types of elder abuse are perceived. A study in the US examined the perceptions of 422 students and 201 middle-age respondents towards elder abuse (Child *et al.* 2000). Middle-aged and younger respondents were found to perceive elder abuse differently, particularly in relation

to psychological abuse. Compared to younger respondents, middle-aged respondents were also more inclined to name the different forms of psychological abuse, were more likely to consider this form of abuse more harmful to the older person and were more willing to report incidences of psychological abuse. The authors concluded that personal socio-demographics and experience that develops with age influences how elder abuse is perceived.

A relationship has also been reported between age and perceptions of what constitutes elder abuse. A Greek study found that as a person aged they were less likely to perceive elder abuse to mean physical abuse (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). Similarly, a UK study reported that younger people (18%) were significantly more inclined to refer to physical abuse than older people (11%) (Hussein *et al.* 2007). This might suggest that younger people assume abuse to mean the obvious form of physical abuse as this form is more visible. Furthermore, as people age, they may become less concerned with violence and more concerned with other forms of abuse such as neglect or psychological abuse (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). Consistent with these findings, a positive relationship was reported between age and the number of references to neglect among older respondents in England indicating an increase in concern among people that they will be neglected in their old age (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a). Similar findings were reported among a convenience sample in Turkey where the older the respondent, the more inclined they were to list examples of abandonment as examples of extreme abuse (Yalcinkaya *et al.* 2006). Conversely, a study in Brazil reported that despite 'psychological neglect', followed by 'neglect/abandonment' being the most commonly cited forms of abuse, the older the respondent, the more likely they were to identify physical aggression as forms of elder abuse (Bezerra-Flanders & Clark 2006).

5.8.2.2 Gender

Gender has been reported to correlate with how elder abuse is perceived. A UK study found that women had more knowledge of elder abuse (and associated elder abuse mainly with 'poor personal care') and were one and half times more likely to believe that there is a higher prevalence of neglect and mistreatment of older people than men (Hussein *et al.* 2007). These findings may reflect the higher percentage of females among carers for older people (Nolan *et al.* 2004). Consistent with these findings, a US study reported that female college students were more likely to perceive elder abuse as more serious issue than men (Fehr *et al.* 2004 cited in Hussein *et al.* 2007). In particular, women expressed greater

concern for the psychological needs of older people, while none of the male participants mentioned any forms of physical neglect and were more likely to relate moderate forms of abuse to acts which exerted power over an older person (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006a).

Furthermore, compared to Japanese men, women were more inclined to give examples of psychological neglect as a moderate form of elder abuse and verbal abuse as an example of mild abuse (Arai 2006). The authors concluded that women might be more sensitive to forms of abuse that do not result in physical injury (Arai 2006). Consistent with these findings, a convenience sample in Portugal found that men were more inclined than women to cite physical aggression as an example of elder abuse, while women were more likely to cite examples relating to abandonment (Mercurio & Nyborn 2006). It is noted in this study that none of the men mentioned abandonment as a form of elder abuse, however three women mentioned this as an extreme form of elder abuse. Although based on very small numbers, if these figures reflected those of a representative sample, then this finding would be consistent with those of the World Health Organisation (2002) which reported that women fear being left alone in their old age more than men (Mercurio & Nyborn 2006).

5.8.3 Characteristics of the perceived victim

Public perceptions of abusive behaviours may differ dependent on who is being abused. In Hong Kong, Yuk-chung *et al.* (2008) compared public perceptions of abuse towards three main social groups: the elderly, children and spouses. Findings revealed that behaviours such as battering and slapping, sexual advances, physical restraint, failing to provide adequate clothing, verbal threatening, not being brought to the doctors and being left at home unattended were deemed more abusive when applied to an older person than to a child or a spouse (Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008). In particular, the public viewed battering (97%) and slapping (94%) as more abusive when inflicted upon an older person than when directed at a child (66% and 38% respectively) (Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008). Scolding and verbal threatening were also perceived as less acceptable towards older people than towards children (Yuk-chung *et al.* 2008). However, the deep underpinning cultural beliefs held by Chinese culture, where young people are obliged to obey their elders may help to explain these findings (Lui 1986).

5.8.4 The changing health of an older person

Several studies indicated that the changing health of older people might influence the public's perceptions of elder abuse. In Ireland, nearly a third of participants perceived older people as more vulnerable to being subjected to abuse because of their frailty, dependency and reliance on others (HSE 2009). An older person's deteriorating mental health can increase their vulnerability to abuse (special EUROBAROMETER 2007). Approximately one in five participants in Ireland reported that older people might become more vulnerable to abuse because of declining mental ability or a loss of assertiveness/self-confidence (HSE 2009). Similarly, Werner *et al.* (2005) reported that the onset of mental health problems in older people might increase people's tolerance for abuse. For example, participants were more tolerant of abusive behaviours towards an older person with Alzheimer's than when the abuse was directed at an older person with a physical health problem such as osteoporosis (Werner *et al.* 2005). A person with osteoporosis may be viewed as someone still in control with mental alertness, where a person with Alzheimer's may be viewed as someone who may need more controls in place and support for their own safety. Consistent with this finding, a study of college students found physical abuse more acceptable when an older person became agitated, senile and developed poor mental health (Mills *et al.* 1998).

Therefore, it appears that the vulnerability and poor mental health of an older person may influence a person's perception of elder abuse. It is thought that the more frail and vulnerable an older person is deemed to be, the more likely they are to be subjected to abuse, and in circumstances where an older person's mental health deteriorates, abusive behaviours may be perceived as more acceptable.

5.8.5 Cultural values and beliefs

As previously reported, cultural values and beliefs play a significant role in how elder abuse is perceived and defined. Similarities and differences in perceptions of elder abuse among several cultural groups have been studied (Moon 2000). Moon and Williams (1993) revealed that older Korean immigrant women were more tolerant of potentially abusive situations (50% perceived situations to be potentially abusive) when compared to Caucasian (67%) and African Americans (73%). Another finding consistently reported throughout various cultures was that older people perceived psychological abuse and neglect to be as harmful as physical abuse, if not worse (Moon 2000). Moon (2000) concluded that the

evidence suggests that psychological abuse and neglect are highly prevalent among ethnic minority groups and therefore negatively perceived.

In Greece, domestic violence has been deemed wrong, but not a crime. A Greek study by Daskalopoulos *et al.* (2006b) asked respondents to report examples which they considered to be extreme, moderate and mild forms of abuse. The most commonly reported forms of elder abuse were neglect, both physical and psychological (not attending to care or emotional needs), psychological aggression, physical aggression and mistreatment related to goods and services (making an elderly parent work; not giving them money). Physical hitting and beating were deemed the most severe form of elder abuse (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). Abandonment was also noted as an extreme form of elder abuse while psychological abuse was deemed more as a mild or moderate form of abuse towards the elderly (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). Across all levels of abuse (mild, moderate and severe), the most cited form of abuse overall was verbal aggression (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b). These findings confirm that acts of omission are considered just as abusive as acts of commission and that although the respondents in the Greek study are concerned with psychological abuse of the elderly, physical violence is perceived as more abusive which is consistent with the Greek view that violence against the older population is considered unacceptable (Daskalopoulos *et al.* 2006b).

Elder abuse must be defined and understood within the cultural context in which it occurs. This means considering differences in for example ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientations when examining the area of elder abuse. These can impact on how elder abuse is perceived and help to explain differences in what are deemed acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours towards the elderly.

6. Limitations

There are several limitations to note in this literature review. Firstly, the lack of a uniform definition of elder abuse creates challenges for researchers when making comparisons between studies (Malley-Morrison *et al.* 2006). For example, Hussein *et al.* (2007) cautioned that the definition and the amalgamation of 'neglect and mistreatment' for the purpose of their study may have impacted on the findings of their survey. Therefore, findings from this review should be considered with some caution as comparisons between studies have been made, regardless of the definition of elder abuse adopted by each study.

Secondly, this literature review is based on studies that have examined the perceptions of the general public where specific societal groups (children, older people and professionals) have been excluded. As Moon and Williams (1993) suggested, elder abuse might be perceived differently by sub-groups in society. Also, according to Hudson & Carlson (1998), in order to incorporate a sound empirical base in the classification and definition of elder abuse and neglect, the perceptions of different populations would need to be examined.

Thirdly, in several studies, participants were not randomly sampled. Many consisted of a relatively small convenience sample and so may not have been representative of the population. Studies also varied in participant's age and gender and in methods used to measure perceptions thereby making comparisons between studies more difficult particularly as the perceptions of older adults and females were over-represented in a number of studies.

Fourthly, the recruitment processes in studies may have impacted on the findings. Hussein *et al.* (2007) acknowledged in their study that there was a certain level of self-selection for the survey as up to 30 telephone calls had to be made before each respondent was recruited. This may have resulted in biased results.

Finally, several studies explored perceptions of abuse towards elderly parents, therefore perceptions are reported based within the context of family relationships with perceptions focusing on the parent as opposed to older people in general. This may have had implications for the findings.

7. Summary & conclusion

The literature has revealed that elder abuse is a diverse and multidimensional concept which can be perceived and interpreted differently by members of the public. Definitional issues surrounding terminology relating to elder abuse continue to be problematic and cause confusion for researchers, the public and for policy makers alike. A lack of an agreed uniform definition for elder abuse results in the term being interpreted differently which also creates challenges for those researching the field of elder abuse as this makes comparisons between studies more difficult.

Traditional cultural values and belief systems such as family solidarity, familial privacy and filial piety are frequently embedded in how elder abuse is defined and

what behaviours are deemed acceptable. Intergenerational cultural disparity over recent years has interfered with traditional cultural values, often fuelling family stresses and conflict, leaving older people even more vulnerable to abuse. These issues can have implications for the risk of abuse and approaches to problem solving among different groups. Failure to consider such cultural differences could result in untimely, ill tailored and ineffective interventions and thus unsuccessful outcomes.

A review of the literature suggests that the public have reasonable awareness of elder abuse, however this varies between cultures and greater knowledge and awareness is more prevalent among younger people. This creates cause for concern, because if older people are not alert and well informed about elder abuse, then they are in less of an optimal position to protect themselves from abuse. Furthermore older people express fear of being abandoned and neglected as they grow older. The thought of this was reportedly more distressing for them than the possibility of being physically abused. Some older people might endure physical and psychological abusive behaviours, in an effort to keep their spouse or family member with them who may be their only source of care and support.

General agreement exists in relation to types of elder abuse, as perceived by the public, however certain types are more tolerated in certain cultures than in others. In general, the public were more familiar with psychological abuse, neglect and physical abuse than any other forms of abuse. Acts of omission (neglect) were deemed just as abusive as acts of commission (physical abuse). Sexual abuse and financial abuse were seldom mentioned and were therefore generally not considered by the public. This is yet another area of concern, as financial abuse in particular may become more prevalent as people may not recognise such behaviours resulting in material or economic loss for an elderly person, as abusive. When it comes to reporting abuse, findings from the review revealed that the public had little confidence around responding to and dealing with elder abuse. Few knew the correct procedures to take; who to approach; what this would entail; and what the implications of reporting abuse might be. However, if a person knew someone who had suffered elder abuse then they tended to be more aware and confident around dealing with such issues.

Perceptions of elder abuse may be dependent on a number of other factors including age and gender. Younger people tend to be more knowledgeable of the extent of this problem than older people. However few young people were

familiar with the different types of elder abuse with physical abuse being the most commonly cited form of abuse, possibly because this type is more obvious and has the most visible outcomes. Women were more inclined to be more sensitive to neglect and psychological abuse, which may be reflective of the 'caring role', that they are perceived to adopt in comparison to men. The review also suggested that elder abuse may be perceived as more acceptable in instances whereby the older person develops a mental health problem. These older people may be viewed more difficult to care for and so it may then be considered justified to engage in behaviours such as physical restraint. Tolerance for such behaviours under these circumstances makes older people more vulnerable to being abused.

Further research is necessary into the settings where elder abuse is most likely to occur as disparities exist in the literature. Although some evidence exists which indicates high satisfaction levels among older people in care homes and hospitals, it is in these settings where the public perceive elder abuse to be at its highest. The literature also indicates that elder abuse is more prevalent in the family home.

In conclusion this review highlights the need to increase awareness of elder abuse, especially among older people themselves, whilst paying particular attention to the cultural values and norms in which it occurs. This greatly depends on a country's priorities and their commitment to providing information, developing interventions and formulating policies to tackle the problem of elder abuse. In Ireland, progress has been made, however further partnerships, collaboration and initiatives need to be made in order to combat elder abuse.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendations for Practice

1. Organisations and practitioners should work together to develop and establish a global universally accepted definition of elder abuse. Clearly defining elder abuse will facilitate identification and management of cases, as well as with the implementation and evaluation of preventative and interventional programmes to protect older people. Consideration should be given to cultural differences, beliefs and values when developing a definition for elder abuse.
2. Reporting procedures should be made easier and more transparent so that the public are more informed and have confidence in whom they should report to and where to go for help. They should also be able to understand the ways in which authorities will follow up on the reported cases. This in turn should help to reduce underreporting of elder abuse incidents and increase promptness in dealing with incidences of elder abuse.
3. Efforts need to be invested in increasing the public's knowledge and awareness of elder abuse through the use of the media and campaigns, with particular emphasis on recognising elder abuse, and where to get information and support when elder abuse occurs.
4. Services need to increase community-based programmes and outreach programmes for older people so as to decrease opportunities for neglect and mistreatment. Having regular contact with such services would also help to reduce older people's fear and anxiety of being on their own.

Recommendations for Education

5. There is a need to develop public educational programmes through the mass media and/or information programmes explaining the extent of the problem, to make known what elder abuse is and highlight the harmful consequences. This information needs to promote informative beliefs rather than misconceptions and stigmatising beliefs surrounding elder abuse. These programmes should be tailored to meet the needs of:
 - Older people, as those who are being abused may not recognise their mistreatment as such. Education can increase awareness of the extent of the problem and promote and empowerment older people to protect themselves.
 - Younger people, so that they gain a better understanding of elder abuse and become familiar with the different types of elder abuse.

Schools in particular should incorporate information relating to elder abuse into their educational programmes.

- Different ethnic/cultural groups. As the review demonstrated, understanding and recognising elder abuse varies according to cultural beliefs and values of different groups, therefore these differences need to be taken into account when developing informational programmes.

Recommendations for Research

6. Due to the discrepancy in the literature, further research needs to be conducted to investigate the extent of elder abuse in institutional and residential settings to allow for comparisons with the prevalence of elder abuse in community settings.
7. Further research is needed to compare and contrast definitions of elder abuse as ascribed by the public and by professionals and to explore the factors that influence differences in perceptions.
8. Further explore factors affecting help-seeking behaviours and reporting of elder abuse among different societal groups, so that these factors can be targeted to promote, encourage and increase reporting of elder abuse.

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Appendix 1: A summary of studies which examine public perceptions of elder abuse

Study	Country	Design	Aim	Sample	Main Findings
Daskalopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2006)	England	An exploratory study using an open-ended survey	Investigate perceptions of elder abuse by adult children towards their ageing parents	Participants recruited as part of a larger study N= 50, 39 females & 11 males Aged 20 to 73 years	Physical aggression was perceived more often as extreme abuse. Forms of neglect and psychological abuse were most commonly given as examples of moderate and mild abuse. A positive relationship was found between age and references to physical neglect.
Yalcinkaya <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Turkey	An exploratory study using an open-ended survey	Explore attitudes towards elder abuse by adult children towards their ageing parents	Participants recruited as part of a larger study Convenience sample N=39, 25 females & 14 males Aged 22 to 58 years	The most common example of extreme abuse was neglect, particularly physical neglect. Psychological aggression was perceived more as moderate and mild abuse. A positive correlation was found with age and examples of abandonment at extreme levels.
Mercurio & Nyborn (2006)	Portugal	An exploratory study using an open-ended survey	Elicit examples of the kinds of behaviour towards the elderly that are considered to be extremely, moderately, or mildly abusive.	Participants recruited as part of a larger study N=34, 17 females & 17 males Aged 15 to 59 years	Neglect, physical maltreatment and psychological abuse were the most frequently reported types of abuse. Neglect and physical abuse considered more as extreme abuse. Females gave significantly more examples of abandonment as extreme abuse than men.
Arai (2006)	Japan	An exploratory study using an open-ended survey	Determine what behaviours from an adult child to an elderly parent were considered abusive at different	N=146 100 females & 46 males Aged 19 to 60 years	Physical aggression, followed by neglect and blaming were given as examples of extreme abuse. Physical abuse was the commonly mentioned type of extreme abuse. Women

			levels of abuse (extreme moderate or mild)		considered psychological neglect examples of mild abuse.
Rinsky & Malley-Morrison (2006)	Russia	An exploratory study using an open-ended survey	Analyse perceptions of elder abuse as reflected in examples of abusive behaviour from an adult child to ageing parents	Participants recruited from a larger convenience sample N=21 10 females and 10 males Aged 17 to 43 years	Examples of physical violence were given as examples of extreme abuse. Psychological aggression, particularly verbal aggression and neglect were deemed typical examples of moderate abuse. References to psychological aggression and verbal aggression were mentioned more by females than males.
Chan <i>et al.</i> (2008)	China	A random sample survey using telephone interviews	Examine whether perception and reporting of abuse will be different with respect to who the victim is and how the victim is abused.	Participants recruited through a random sample N=470 Aged 18 years +	Physical forms of mistreatment inflicted upon older people were deemed more abusive than when inflicted upon a spouse or child. If the victim of elder abuse involves an older family member, then the public are likely to report than if it involved a spouse or a child.
Daskalopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Greece	An exploratory qualitative study using an open-ended survey	Analyse examples of elder mistreatment in a conveniences sample of Greek adults	Participants recruited from a larger sample N=71 46 females and 24 males (1 participant did not report their gender) Aged 17 to 87 years	The most frequent mentioned types of elder mistreatment were verbal abuse, psychological neglect, physical neglect and hitting. Half of the examples given at extreme abuse were physical abuse. Predominate examples of moderate abuse were psychological abuse and neglect. Females were more often presented as victims of abuse than males.
Werner <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Israel	A qualitative study using face to face	Examine reactions to abuse, with special attention to types of	A non-probability sample N=169 Aged 48 to 88 years	People were more inclined to express positive emotions, express a higher percentage of sympathy, have a

		structured interviews	disease: Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis.		desire to help and express concern when abuse was directed at an older person with Alzheimer's than an older person with osteoporosis.
Hudson <i>et al.</i> (2000)	US	An exploratory study using semi-structured interviews	Measure public perceptions of the meaning of elder abuse, identify significant differences of perceptions held by defined groups of the public, and identify possible reasons for those differences.	A random sample of adults N= 424 Caucasian Americans Aged 40 years to 93 years	A total of 90% of respondents had heard of 'elder abuse'. Nearly eight percent reported that they had directly experienced elder abuse. Most respondents deemed the mistreatment of the elderly as unacceptable. Only <i>one</i> incident of yelling, swearing, slapping or hitting was deemed to warrant the label of elder abuse.
Hussein <i>et al.</i> (2007)	UK	An exploratory study using a structured telephone interviews.	Examine the public's knowledge and awareness of neglect and mistreatment of older people in the UK	A representative sample N = 1000 519 females & 481 males Aged 16 to 90 years	Older people believe that there are less incidences of elder abuse than younger people. One in four reported that they knew an older person who had been abused. Care homes and hospitals were perceived to be the most likely settings for elder abuse. Participants reported that they would be inclined to approach social services or paid carers to report elder abuse.