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By: **Emily Dakin** and Sue Pearlmutter

Abstract

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Older Women's Perceptions of Elder Maltreatment and Ethical Dilemmas in Adult Protective Services: A Cross-Cultural, Exploratory Study

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In this study, older African American, Latina, and Caucasian women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds participated in eight focus groups that examined their perceptions of elder maltreatment and three ethical dilemmas within adult protective service work: mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, and criminalization of elder maltreatment. Participants espoused a broad and inclusive view of elder maltreatment. In responding to illustrative case scenarios, participants strongly favored protection over freedom by supporting mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services. Criminalization of elder maltreatment also was supported. This article presents results of each scenario and broad themes across the study, with attention paid to areas of consistency and difference across ethnicity and socioeconomic categories.

KEYWORDS *elder abuse, elder neglect, ethical dilemmas, elder mistreatment, elder maltreatment, public perceptions, mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, criminalization, culture, socioeconomic status, ethnicity*

The freedom versus protection dilemma is the largest and most longstanding overarching dilemma in adult protective service (APS) work. The issues of

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mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services both reflect the larger dilemma of whether to err on the side of freedom (autonomy) or protection (beneficence) when responding to older or dependent adults who are experiencing abuse or neglect (here called collectively "elder maltreatment"). The question as to whether elder abuse and neglect reporting should be mandatory or voluntary continues to be a matter of controversy, despite the fact that more than four-fifths of states mandate the reporting of elder abuse among specified professionals and other designated individuals (Anetzberger, 2005; Koenig & DeGuerre, 2005; Teaster, 2003). Those opposed to mandatory reporting (favoring autonomy) statutes voice the concern that they are paternalistic and limit self-determination, engender helplessness by discouraging victims from reporting abuse on their own behalf, and lead to stigmatizing and intrusive investigations with resulting losses in privacy and confidentiality (Faulkner, 1982; Gilbert, 1986; Koenig & DeGuerre, 2005; Simmons & O'Brien, 1999). Furthermore, because of limitations in service availability, mandatory reporting may lead to solutions (e.g., nursing home placement) that are worse than the abuse (Blenkner, Bloom, Nielsen, & Weber, 1974; Lachs, Williams, O'Brien, & Pillemer, 2002; Rodriguez, Wallace, Woolf, & Mangione, 2006; Simmons & O'Brien, 1999). Additionally, research indicates that public and professional awareness of elder maltreatment are more important than mandatory reporting laws for case identification (House Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care, 1990; Silva, 1992). Other research has found that mandatory reporting statutes are not associated with higher rates of reporting, although they are associated with higher investigation rates (Daly, Jogerst, Brinig, & Dawson, 2003). Those in favor of mandatory reporting statutes (favoring protection) believe that they lead to the provision of essential services for people, most of whom request or consent to these services (Duke, 1997), and have the potential to improve quality of life (Rodriguez et al., 2006). Others have argued that passage of mandatory reporting laws allows reporters to feel protected and more comfortable in making reports (House Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care, 1990; Simmons & O'Brien, 1999).

Involuntary protective services refer to protective interventions initiated by APS workers and ordered by a probate court (Duke, 1997). Typically, involuntary protective service orders are for time-limited services such as geriatric assessment, brief hospitalization, or temporary nursing home placement. When an older adult is clearly lacking in decision-making capacity, these orders are generally agreed to be acceptable. However, when the decision-making abilities of an elder are uncertain and the elder opposes the order, weighing the values of protection (providing the involuntary protective service) and freedom (not ordering the protective service) becomes very difficult (Beaulieu & Leclerc, 2006; Dong & Gorbien, 2005; Schimer & Anetzberger, 1999). Those in favor of involuntary protective services in uncertain cases emphasize their importance in ensuring the basic safety of vulnerable

adults and, at times, the need to balance the client's self-determination with the safety and well-being of others (Duke, 1997). Those opposed cite their potential to be misused and to do harm (Faulkner, 1982), as well as the importance of self-determination and preserving adults' freedom, including the freedom to make decisions that may be unpopular or viewed by others as unwise (Hayes & Spring, 1988; McLaughlin, 1988).

An additional area of controversy in APS work involves the model APS uses for addressing elder maltreatment. APS systems utilize a social casework approach and have been historically separate from the criminal justice system (Heisler, 2000; Otto, 2000). The 1990s saw a growing understanding of the criminal justice system as being an important mechanism in addressing elder maltreatment (Heisler, 2000), with increases in the number of elder abuse cases prosecuted in recent years (Nerenberg, 2006). Integration and coordination between APS and the criminal justice system has increased, although the value of a criminal justice approach remains controversial (Blakely & Dolon, 2000; Brownell & Wolden, 2002). Those preferring to address elder maltreatment as a social service problem can draw from evidence suggesting that interventions that aid a caregiver may be more effective than criminal sanctions (Ansello, King, & Taler, 1986), and that sanctions against a caregiver may leave the victim without necessary care (Crystal, 1986). Added to this is the problem of the reluctance of elders to seek help if they fear retribution against their relative, nursing home placement, or loss of their care (Crystal, 1986). Finally, research (e.g., Hudson & Carlson, 1999) has demonstrated cultural variation in the definition of elder maltreatment, and criminalizing behavior that not all cultures define as maltreatment is problematic. Arguments in favor of criminalizing elder maltreatment include that it provides a social deterrent, sends the message that maltreatment is a public health issue and not a private family matter, and argues that perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions (Brownell & Wolden, 2002; Heisler, 2000; Morgan, Johnson, & Sigler, 2006). In addition, through sentencing, criminalizing elder maltreatment can be a means of stopping abuse, preventing further abuse, and facilitating court-ordered social service interventions (e.g., substance abuse or mental health treatment) for the perpetrator that could not be mandated with a court order (Heisler, 2000).

A Community Dialogue Series in greater Cleveland, Ohio, examined professional (e.g., law, social work, nursing, medicine) perspectives on these issues (Anetzberger, Dayton, & McMonagle, 1997). The goals of this series were to identify ethical dilemmas common to elder abuse, consider various perspectives regarding these dilemmas, and suggest strategies for resolution. The method for answering these questions was the establishment of a 6-session Community Dialogue Series with 34 participants representing 8 professional disciplines (including medicine and law) and 10 service systems (including social services and mental health). Participants were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including Caucasian, African

American, Puerto Rican, and Asian Indian. The series' six sessions operated as modified focus groups that examined six ethical dilemmas related to the identification and treatment of elder abuse.

1. Should health and social services professionals be mandated to report a known or suspected elder abuse situation?
2. Is elder abuse in the eyes of the beholder?
3. Should the elder abuse perpetrator be regarded as a criminal or person with problems?
4. Should the civil liberties of the abused elder be removed in the interest of providing protection?
5. Should the focus of elder abuse intervention be on preventing or treating the problem?
6. Do we have a responsibility to intercede in elder abuse situations at all?

Series participants agreed that the selected dilemmas presented the greatest challenge to professionals. As a result of the series, guidelines for decision making were developed that provided written and community guidelines for ethical decision making related to elder abuse.

Beginning in the 1990s, a new stream of research addressed the need for an understanding of public perceptions concerning elder maltreatment (e.g., Childs, Hayslip, Radika, & Reinberg, 2000; Hudson & Carlson, 1999; Malley-Morrison, Soon You, & Mills, 2000; Moon & Williams, 1993; Morgan et al., 2006; Mouton et al., 2005). Culture has been examined in public perception research concerning definitions of maltreatment, specifically through variables such as ethnicity (e.g., Hudson & Carlson, 1999; Malley-Morrison et al., 2000; Mouton et al., 2005; San Filippo, Reiboldt, White, & Hails, 2007), degree of acculturation to the larger U.S. culture (e.g., Moon, Tomita, & Jung-Kamei, 2001; Sanchez, 1999), region (e.g., Hudson et al., 2000), and age (e.g., Childs et al., 2000; San Filippo et al., 2007). However, the role of socioeconomic status as an aspect of culture has not yet been examined within this area of research.

Public perception research (e.g., Moon & Benton, 2000; Moon et al., 2001; Morgan et al., 2006; Sanchez, 1999) also has explored public views around intervention and criminalization of elder maltreatment generally, although these issues have not been framed specifically as ethical dilemmas. Largely missing from the literature concerning these dilemmas is the perspective of the potential victim of elder maltreatment. Understanding the potential victim's perspective will help those in the professional arena to make informed policy and practice decisions related to these areas of controversy. Several of the dilemmas and case examples used in the Community Dialogue Series were replicated with a stakeholder audience in the current study's examination of older women's perceptions of elder maltreatment and ethical dilemmas in APS. In this study, older African American,

Latina, and Caucasian women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds participated in eight focus groups that examined their perceptions of elder maltreatment and three of the dilemmas originally explored in the Community Dialogue Series. In particular, this study sought to examine perceptions regarding three of the dilemmas originally examined in the series: mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services (examined in the Community Dialogue Series by the question: "Should the civil liberties of the abused elder be removed in the interest of providing protection?"), both of which illustrate the freedom versus protection dilemma; and the dilemma of criminalizing elder maltreatment. Thus, the study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How does a sample of older women define elder maltreatment?
2. How does a sample of older women perceive the dilemma of freedom versus protection (as seen in the mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services dilemmas)?
3. How does a sample of older women perceive the dilemma of criminalizing elder maltreatment?

METHOD

Participants

This study consisted of eight focus groups with a total of 88 women age 60 and older. The groups ranged in size from 8 to 14 participants. Two focus groups were held in greater Cleveland, Ohio, with working class Caucasian women, two with working class African American women, two with working class Latina women, one with Caucasian women from middle to upper middle socioeconomic status (called "high SES" here), and one with high SES African American women. No high SES Latina group was held because of the limited population of this demographic in the geographic area. Inclusion criteria included being a woman age 60 or older, having no known history of either being a victim or perpetrator of elder maltreatment, and having no work history as a gerontological social worker. Participants' socioeconomic status was assessed through demographic questions pertaining to education and most recent employment that participants answered via a questionnaire prior to their focus group.

Location of Groups

The focus groups, with the exception of the high SES groups, were held at local senior centers. The high SES Caucasian group was held at a high SES area church, and the high SES African American group was held at the home of one of the group's participants. The senior centers and church

were chosen based on the predominant ethnicity and socioeconomic status of their participants and members. Although the participants in the high SES groups were recruited based on their educational and employment background, participants in the working-class focus groups were not specifically recruited based on SES; the SES background of the participants in these groups simply reflected the overall ethnicity and SES characteristics of the senior centers, which were specifically chosen for these characteristics.

Recruitment Method

The study sample was obtained using convenience, snowball, and nomination techniques. Convenience samples included groups of people attending the six senior centers and one church from which the sample was drawn. Potential participants were approached and nominated for the study by volunteer gatekeepers. The gatekeepers were staff of the senior centers where the working-class focus groups took place. In the high SES Caucasian focus group, the gatekeepers were a minister and a member at the church where the focus group took place. In the case of the high SES African American focus group, the gatekeeper role was served by one of the focus group participants. The gatekeepers described the study to potential participants and provided an introductory letter that also described the study. Agreeing participants also sometimes nominated other participants by way of snowball sampling. In the case of the Caucasian and African American focus groups, those agreeing to participate received a confirmation letter and reminder telephone call by the researcher. In the case of the Spanish-speaking Latina focus groups, those agreeing to participate received a confirmation letter and verbal reminder by one of the focus group gatekeepers.

Focus-Group Questions

The study's interview guide was based on three of the dilemmas (i.e., mandatory reporting, dilemmas around involuntary protective services, and criminalization of elder abuse) examined in Anetzberger, Dayton, and McMonagle's (1997) Community Dialogue Series. These dilemmas were presented through case examples (see Scenarios 1, 2, and 3) developed in consultation with the authors from the earlier study. The interview guide was pretested in a pilot focus group with 12 older women (the results of which were not included in the analysis), and the guide consisted of questions that probed participants' views about the definition of elder maltreatment and the dilemmas examined in this study.

Data Collection Method

Each focus group was led by a moderator and one or two assistant moderators, most of whom were senior center staff. The first author served as the

focus-group moderator for all but the Spanish-speaking Latina focus groups. In the Spanish-speaking focus groups, a Spanish-speaking gerontological professional (in one group this was a senior center staff, and in the other this was an outside professional) served as moderator, and another senior center staff person served as assistant moderator. The first author was present at these focus groups to monitor the discussion and ask clarifying questions. Throughout the course of the focus groups, the first author maintained a journal that included the notes from each focus group as well as methodological decisions, impressions and reflections from the group sessions, and debriefing with the moderators (in the Latina focus groups) and assistant moderators. Accepted focus-group moderating techniques call for the moderator and any assistant moderators to take extensive notes throughout the focus group interview regardless of whether the interview is recorded (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The note taking did not appear to influence the flow of the focus groups, and focus-group participants did not appear to be bothered by it. The moderators (in the Latina focus groups) and assistant moderators also provided the first author with their notes from the focus-group session.

Data Extraction

Each focus-group session was recorded on audiotape and transcribed. The Spanish-speaking group recordings were transcribed into English translations by a bilingual English and Spanish speaker. This transcriptionist was known to the researcher and was not affiliated with either of the senior centers where the Latina focus groups took place; the transcriptionist also did not have any role in moderating either of the Latina focus groups. The researcher performed a content analysis of the transcribed data using the "cut and paste" approach, which literally involves cutting transcriptions and sorting them into relevant themes (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The goal of the content analysis was to examine and categorize each group's responses to individual questions, and to look for themes in responses across groups. More specifically, the goal of content analysis in this study was to examine the definitions of elder maltreatment and responses to the dilemmas both within the individual groups and across groups. In addition to examining what actually was said in the focus groups, the analysis also considered what was not said (e.g., self-neglect was barely mentioned in participants' discussions around the definition of elder maltreatment). The analysis used focus-group journals and moderator (in the Latina focus groups) and assistant moderator notes in addition to the focus-group transcriptions. The focus-group transcriptions were the most important element in this analysis, while the journals and notes were helpful for contextualizing and triangulating the transcribed data, as well as for clarifying unclear sections of the transcriptions.

The analysis began with the researcher reading and rereading all of the transcriptions, taking notes throughout. The transcriptions were then read section by section (e.g., the definitional section, the section for each scenario) and quotes were cut out that either pertained directly to that section or did not pertain directly but were nonetheless meaningful. In doing this, the researcher searched for emerging trends, areas of broad agreement or consensus, areas of disagreement, and topics on which participants were silent. The researcher arranged the cut-out quotes into piles of like themes, chose names for these themes, and then taped the groups of themes and individual themes onto large sheets of paper along with their identifying names. Using a table document on a word processor, the researcher listed all of the themes for each section of the interview guide, focus group by focus group. After incorporating themes from all areas of the interview guide and all sections of focus groups onto the table, the researcher then analyzed the table, identifying those themes that had occurred across four or more focus groups per section, calling these "major themes." The researcher also identified themes that were named within four or more focus groups and two or more areas of the questioning route and called these "overarching themes." Finally, the researcher identified "within-group themes," or themes that were noteworthy but were identified by one focus group only.

Establishing Trustworthiness of Data

This research study incorporated a variety of techniques identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research data. In the *prolonged engagement* technique, the researcher invests enough time in the culture to learn the culture, test for misinformation, and build trust. In this study, the focus-group gatekeepers helped the researcher use this technique by proxy; the gatekeepers assisted the researcher in becoming more competent in understanding the cultures represented within the focus groups, and they also were helpful in fostering trust in the research among participants in the focus groups. *Triangulation* is based on the notion that research findings are more credible when they are drawn from multiple sources of data. Triangulation of data was performed through the use of the transcribed focus-group interviews, the researcher's journal, and moderators' and assistant moderators' notes. *Peer debriefing* is another technique used to triangulate data. Peer debriefing involves discussing, reviewing, and testing emerging thoughts, hypotheses, and findings against a disinterested peer to help ensure that one's conclusions or observations are reasonable from others' perspectives. Following each focus-group session, the researcher held a debriefing session with the focus group moderator (in the Latina focus groups) and assistant moderators.

In the *member check* the researcher's categories, interpretations, and conclusions are reviewed by the research participants themselves to determine whether the researcher adequately represented their realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks, then, are an additional means of triangulating data. Member checks occurred in three ways in this study. First, at the close of each focus group the researcher provided a summary of the group discussion and asked participants about its accuracy. Second, the researcher's focus-group notes were mailed to research participants for their review.

A third type of member check performed in this study was a member-check group held several months following completion of the initial focus-group discussions and subsequent to completion of the researcher's initial data analysis. Member-check groups are a technique used in qualitative research in which the researcher shares results of the preliminary data analysis with participants to determine whether their perceptions and beliefs have been accurately understood and conveyed. The researcher then may modify the analysis as a result of the member-check group. All participants from this study's initial focus groups were invited to attend its member-check group. The group had 28 participants from seven of the eight focus groups, and five gatekeepers from five of the focus groups. The participants in the member-check group appeared to be representative of the original sample, and the number of participants in the group was much larger than anticipated. Participants in the member-check group voiced their agreement with the researcher's data analysis; they expressed that their understandings and beliefs about elder maltreatment and the case scenarios had been accurately conveyed by the researcher. In addition to its function of reviewing data analysis with research participants, this group also provided a venue for exploring participants' decision-making processes and afforded participants a sense of closure from their involvement in the study.

One important technique for establishing trustworthiness of qualitative data is the *confirmability audit* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To use this technique, the first author enlisted the assistance of an independent volunteer auditor, who also read the transcriptions and performed an initial thematic analysis that then was checked with the researcher's analysis. The volunteer auditor was a lay person known personally to the researcher but not involved in the field of social work or previously involved in any way with the study. After providing the volunteer auditor with a background and summary description of the study, the researcher then provided copies of the transcriptions for the eight focus groups. Independent of the researcher's data analysis, the volunteer auditor read the transcriptions and formulated initial themes and categorizations of the transcribed data. The volunteer auditor's analysis was more informal than that performed by the researcher, and consisted of highlighting aspects of the data that were found to be particularly striking with less regard for prevalence across focus groups. After independently performing data analyses, the researcher and

volunteer auditor met to review and compare their analyses. The researcher's and volunteer auditor's identified themes were generally consistent and complementary; while the researcher's themes represented a holistic and comprehensive approach to the data, the volunteer auditor identified themes that appeared striking while reading the transcriptions. Therefore, many of the volunteer auditor's themes represented smaller aspects of the researcher's larger themes and/or a somewhat different organization of the data. It was clear that the larger, more comprehensive analysis performed by the researcher was inclusive of the themes identified by the volunteer auditor.

RESULTS

Demographics

Socioeconomic status was assessed via participants' education and most recent employment histories. See Table 1 for a summary of this data. The working-class African American and Caucasian focus-group participants had been employed largely in white-collar and service industry jobs (e.g., paid caregiver or aide, secretary, unspecified work for a company, supervisor in government office). Participants in the two high SES groups were highly educated—most held graduate degrees—and had most recently worked in a variety of fields including, but not limited to, traditional areas of women's employment (e.g., librarian, teacher, real estate agent, professor, nurse, physician, attorney). A degree of crossover existed between the working-class and high SES focus groups; a few of the participants from the working-class African American and one of the Caucasian focus groups were from more middle-class backgrounds, having completed college and/or having held jobs such as teacher, nurse, accountant, or city councilwoman. Conversely, a few of the participants in the high SES groups had not completed college, and/or had most recently held jobs not necessarily tied to a college degree, such as secretarial or sales positions.

The majority of participants in the Latina focus groups were Puerto Rican and had immigrated to the United States as adults. Many participants in these groups either did not indicate a most recent area of employment or listed "housewife" as a most recent area of employment. Among those listing most recent paid employment, the areas of work were often in service industries (e.g., housekeeping, cleaning, nursing assistant); or factories. The majority of participants in these groups had not gone past a primary school education, and no participant had received education beyond high school.

Analysis Protocol

The results of the focus-group interviews are presented by reviewing major findings from each of the study's three questions. Major themes—themes

TABLE 1 Summary of Focus Groups

Focus group	Highest grade of completed education	Most recent employment (if any) ^a
Working-class Caucasian group 1; 8 participants	4—High school grad 3—Some college 1—Bachelor's degree	2—Senior center or nursing home 2—Secretarial or administrative work 1—Technician 2—Unspecified work for a company
Working-class Caucasian group 2; 9 participants	5—High school grad 3—Some college 1—Some grad school	3—Secretarial or administrative work 2—Professional (teacher and accountant) 3—Other (research for telephone company, apartment management, work for bus company)
Working-class African American group 1; 12 participants	1—11th grade 1—High school grad 6—Some college 2—Bachelor's degree 2—Data not available	3—Paraprofessional caregiver/aide 4—Professional (nurse, child care director, city council) 4—Other (waitress, beauty shop and building owner, secretary, unspecified work for a company)
Working-class African American group 2; 14 participants	1—11th grade 4—High school grad 9—Some college	2—Paraprofessional (LPN, teaching assistant) 2—Senior center or senior meal program 3—Professional (city council, government office supervisor) 3—Other (self-employed, hospital ombudsman, unspecified work for a company)
High SES African American; 9 participants	1—Some college 1—Bachelor's degree	5—Professional (librarian, professor, university administration, real estate investor) 4—Other (property insurance—title—owner, salesperson, office manager)

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Focus group	Highest grade of completed education	Most recent employment (if any) ^a
High SES Caucasian; 12 participants	1—Some grad school 6—Master's or PhD	
	1—High school grad 1—Some college 2—Bachelor's degree 8—Master's, JD or MD	9—Professional (realtor, professor, economist, physician, teacher, nurse, attorney) 2—Secretarial or administrative work 1—Other (nitting instructor)
Latino group 1; 14 participants	2—No formal education 7—2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade 4—7th, 8th, or 9th grade 1—High school graduate	8—Indicated "housewife" as most recent employment 3—Nursing assistant or homecare 2—Housekeeping or housecleaning 1—Other (factory work)
Latino group 2; 10 participants	1—No formal education 5—2nd, 4th, or 5th grade 3—8th or 9th grade 1—High school graduate	3—Factory work (e.g., car factory, seamstress in a factory) 2—Other (work in a greenhouse, laundry work)

Note. SES = socioeconomic status; grad school = graduate school.

^aWhen number does not add up to the total number of participants in a group, the remaining are participants who do not work in a paid capacity, or had not done so recently.

present in four or more focus groups—for each question are presented, followed by within-group themes for the question. The description of each area of the interview guide route is accompanied by one table that lists presence of themes across all eight focus groups and another table that lists ethnicity and SES trends within each theme.

QUESTION ONE: HOW DOES A SAMPLE OF OLDER WOMEN
DEFINE ELDER MALTREATMENT?

As indicated in Table 2, participants espoused a broad and inclusive view of elder maltreatment. Elder maltreatment was understood in terms of physical and emotional neglect, verbal abuse, societal maltreatment (maltreatment of older adults by the government, and facets of the medical system such as high cost of health insurance, prescription drugs, emergency rooms, hospitals, nursing homes), physical abuse, financial abuse, maltreatment by strangers (older people being ignored or treated carelessly or incompetently in such places as stores, post offices, hospitals, or when needing assistance with tasks such as purchasing gas or crossing the street), putting or abandoning an elder relative in a nursing home, maltreatment within nursing homes, and maltreatment by family members. The latter two definitional elements demonstrate that participants understood maltreatment as occurring both in the community by family members and in nursing homes. "Putting or abandoning an elderly relative in a nursing home" was viewed, particularly in the Latina groups, as an abdication of one's responsibility to care for one's elders. In other groups, placing an elder relative in a nursing home and then failing to visit the elder or have further involvement was identified as a type of emotional neglect. Table 3 contains a summary of trends across ethnicity and SES categories and Table 4 provides illustrative quotes.

TABLE 2 Major Themes for Definition of Elder Maltreatment

Theme	AA1	AA2	Cau1	Cau2	Lat1	Lat2	*AA	*Cau
1. Physical neglect	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
2. Emotional neglect	X	X		X		X	X	
3. Verbal abuse		X			X	X	X	X
4. Societal maltreatment	X	X		X				X
5. Physical abuse			X		X		X	X
6. Financial abuse	X	X	X	X				
7. Maltreatment by strangers	X			X	X	X		
8. Putting elder relative in nursing home				X	X	X		X
9. Maltreatment in nursing homes	X		X	X		X	X	X
10. Maltreatment by family	X	X	X	X		X	X	X

Note. AA = the working class African American focus groups; Cau = the Caucasian focus groups; Lat = the Latina focus groups; *AA = the high SES African American focus group; *Cau = the high SES Caucasian focus groups.

TABLE 3 Summary of Major Themes for Definition of Elder Maltreatment Across Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Major theme	Summary of major theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic status
1. Physical neglect	Mentioned within seven of eight groups; no differences across ethnicity or SES apparent.
2. Emotional neglect	Mentioned in all three African American focus groups. (Theme present in five groups total.)
3. Verbal abuse	Mentioned in both Latina focus groups, both high SES groups, but within neither of the working-class Caucasian groups. (Theme present in five groups total.)
4. Societal maltreatment	Mentioned in both of the working class African American groups, but within neither of the Latina groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
5. Physical abuse	Mentioned within both of the high SES groups, but within neither of the working class African American groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
6. Financial abuse	Mentioned within all four working-class African American and Caucasian focus groups, but within none of the Latina or high SES focus groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
7. Maltreatment by strangers	Mentioned within both of the Latina focus groups, but within neither of the high SES groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
8. Putting elder relative in nursing home	Mentioned within both of the Latina focus groups, but within none of the three African American focus groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
9. Maltreatment in nursing homes	Mentioned within six of eight focus groups; no differences across ethnicity or SES apparent.
10. Maltreatment by family	Mentioned within seven of eight focus groups; no differences across ethnicity or SES apparent.

In addition to the major themes, noteworthy within-group themes occurred within four focus groups. The high SES African American focus group included the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren within their definition of elder maltreatment. For this group, grandparents raising grandchildren represented a form of elder maltreatment perpetrated by the grandparents' adult children. These adult children were seen as mistreating their elder parents by asking them to provide childcare and other work that they (the adult children) should be assuming. Interestingly, the high SES Caucasian focus group was the only group to include self-neglect within their definition of elder maltreatment. The urban middle-class and working-class African American focus group, which was held at a senior center located in a high-crime urban setting, included fear of crime by strangers within its understanding of elder maltreatment. Specifically, this focus group described physically violent and criminal elder maltreatment perpetrated by strangers. Participants in one of the working-class African American focus groups expressed the view that it is abusive not to report elder maltreatment.

TABLE 4 Illustrative Quotes for Major Themes for Definition of Elder Maltreatment

Major theme	Illustrative quotes
1. Physical neglect	"Grannies left in rooms with nobody taking care of them and ignoring them totally. You know being incontinent and not getting enough to eat."
2. Emotional neglect	"Taking an elderly person and just leaving them sit. Never doing anything with them. Not talking with them. That's abuse, I should think."
3. Verbal abuse	"When the parents begin to lose it and become incompetent and one or another and it's usually the mental and it's usually very hard for the kids to handle when mom forgets things. Or dad is unable to do things. And they can become verbally abusive and they can be very condescending and it hurts. It hurts a lot."
4. Societal maltreatment	"What about the cost now of rest homes? Not only one thousand a month, but to four thousand a month in some places. Isn't that abuse?"
5. Physical abuse	"if somebody is getting difficult to handle sometimes there is even physical abuse like abuse of children, like spanking or smacking or whatever."
6. Financial abuse	"They also have financial abuse where the families use it [an elder's money] instead of using it for them. We had a woman — here that used to come in here and talk to me all the time and say how her daughter was taking all her money and stuff."
7. Maltreatment by strangers	"There are also other people, though they aren't family members, they see an elderly person, and as they are, old, and . . . they're going to cross the street, and instead of giving them a hand, it's like they're not worth anything, they don't even remember that they're going to get to that same place."
8. Putting elder relative in nursing home	"A lot of people put a family person in the nursing home. That's it. They don't go to visit them. That is abuse. Whether they have Alzheimer's or broken hip or what. And they don't, do not check up on that patient."
9. Maltreatment in nursing homes	"What I'm talking about is when they're really, like a nursing home, they abuse the elderly people. They don't look after them like they should and they want you to pay, for them too."
10. Maltreatment by family	"And a lot of the people have relatives that abuse them, don't look after them. They get the money and they run. That's what I call abuse."

One of the working-class Caucasian focus groups emphasized elder maltreatment occurring within medical settings such as hospitals and emergency rooms. Most of the group's discussion around elder maltreatment within hospitals and emergency rooms focused on carelessness, lack of thoroughness, neglect, and inexperienced medical practitioners. Although one of the Latina focus groups also discussed maltreatment within hospitals, this discussion was centered within the larger context of being ignored or treated carelessly or incompetently within a variety of situations such as medical settings, stores, government agencies, and so on. The other focus

groups, in contrast, limited their discussions of institutional elder maltreatment to nursing homes.

QUESTION TWO: HOW DOES A SAMPLE OF OLDER WOMEN PERCEIVE
THE DILEMMAS OF FREEDOM VERSUS PROTECTION?

Both the mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services dilemmas represent the larger dilemma of whether to err on the side of freedom (autonomy) or protection (beneficence) in responding to the needs of abused or neglected vulnerable adults.

Mandatory Reporting Dilemma. Scenario 1 illustrates the mandatory reporting dilemma (see Table 5 for a listing of major themes across focus groups and Table 6 for a summary of trends across ethnicity and SES categories). A majority of the focus-group members in six of the eight focus groups were supportive of mandatory reporting. As one participant stated, "You have to report it. You can't let people keep doing things and not do anything about it." The majority of participants in two focus groups did not favor mandated reporting. For instance, participants sometimes thought that the situation should be dealt with in-house before moving outside existing service and family networks for resolution.

I think the government is too often not the best way to go. . . . start out with what they can do in the senior center maybe and provide help that way first. Then see how things progress and get her to talk more about it.

SCENARIO 1 Mandatory Reporting

"Florence" Mandatory Reporting Scenario

Florence, a quiet, 66-year-old woman, is a regular at the senior center's lunch program. She usually keeps to herself and often seems distracted. She doesn't talk much about her home life or about Al, her husband of 40 years. Today, Florence seems upset and begins crying after lunch. The senior center worker asks what is upsetting her, and Florence explains that she was shaky this morning when she forgot to take her insulin and spilled Al's coffee. She said that he grabbed her arms and shoved her against the wall. She also talked about how he upset her, as he often does, by calling her "no good." Florence says she can't tolerate his threats and physical aggression as well as she could when they were younger. However, when she finishes crying, she firmly tells the worker that Al doesn't really mean to upset her. In fact, she says that if she could just do a better job he wouldn't act this way. She also says that Al will apologize to her later and then whispers to the worker, "Please don't tell anyone about this."

TABLE 5 Major Themes for Mandatory Reporting Dilemma

Major theme	AA1	AA2	Cau1	Cau2	Lat1	Lat2	*AA	*Cau
1. In favor of reporting the situation to APS	X	X	X	X		X	X	
2. Personal experience with domestic violence		X		X	X	X		
3. Identifying scenario as abusive		X	X	X	X		X	X
4. Views about APS	X		X	X		X	X	X
5. Family theme	X	X	X	X	X			
6. Counsel Florence and Al together	X		X		X	X		
7. Views about intervention with Al		X	X			X	X	X

Note. AA = the working-class African American focus groups; Cau = the Caucasian focus groups; Lat = the Latina focus groups; *AA = the high SES African American focus group; and *Cau = the high SES Caucasian focus groups.

All participants felt that protecting Florence was important regardless of whether they espoused mandatory reporting. The high SES Caucasian group and one of the Latino groups felt, however, that mandatory reporting was extreme and favored informal intervention in the form of mobilizing families and social networks to help the victim.

A strong emphasis was given to family-based interventions—regardless of whether the case was reported to APS—within the working-class focus groups, and particularly within the Latina groups. One participant espousing this view stated, “Well, if there are family members, she [the APS worker] should contact the family members.” Similarly, the working-class African American focus groups described the importance of the church community and minister in helping to address domestic abuse. Regardless of whether help should emanate from her formal or informal network, however, participants were clear that the woman in the mandatory reporting case needed and deserved to be helped.

In addition to generally supporting mandatory reporting policies, the participants voiced a variety of views, positive and negative, about APS. It appeared that views about APS were somewhat more positive in the working-class focus groups than in the high SES focus groups. On the positive side, one participant stated:

Now maybe I’ve got too much faith in Adult Protective Services, but it would seem to me that if . . . [I] were a social worker and I got a call from the worker at this program, and she described the situation, then I would be sensitive enough to know that this woman is fragile, that she has all the things we’ve said.

Another participant with a more negative view of APS stated, “And I’m just not feeling today, given budget cuts, et cetera, and all the political things, I’m not that comfortable with protective services.” Interestingly, although many participants described positive and negative views of APS, it was apparent that few participants, if any, actually were familiar with APS;

TABLE 6 Summary of Major Themes for Mandatory Reporting Dilemma Across Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Major theme	Summary of major theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic status
1. In favor of reporting the situation to APS	Although the majority of participants in six focus groups favored reporting, African American and working-class groups may have had somewhat more positive views about reporting than the other groups.
2. Personal experience with domestic violence	Participants in both Latina focus groups described many personal experiences with domestic violence, whereas personal experiences with domestic violence were not described at all in the high SES focus groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
3. Identifying scenario as abusive	Mentioned within 6 of 8 focus groups; theme present across ethnicity and SES categories, with Latina participants additionally identifying scenario as normative.
4. Views about APS	Both positive and negative views were expressed. Some evidence that working-class African American and Caucasian focus groups had more favorable views about APS than did high SES African American and Caucasian focus groups. (Theme present in six groups total.)
5. Family theme	Greater emphasis on utilizing family in interventions within working-class focus groups than within high SES focus groups because neither of the high SES groups identified this theme. (Theme present in five groups total.) Participants in the Latina groups placed a greater emphasis than did other groups on the goal of intervention being to preserve marriage.
6. Counsel Florence and Al together	Theme present within both Latina focus groups in which a greater emphasis was placed on intervening to preserve the marriage; other groups recommended counseling both Florence and Al together to improve Florence's situation, rather than primarily to improve the marriage. Neither high SES group mentioned this theme. (Theme present in four groups total.)
7. Views about intervention with Al	Somewhat greater emphasis in Latina groups on intervening to preserve marriage; other groups discussed intervening with Al as a means to improve Florence's situation. Both positive and negative views about intervening with Al were expressed. (Theme present in five groups total.)

comments about social workers and APS were based on more general impressions of social services and social workers than an awareness of this specific branch of governmental service.

A variety of opinions, positive and negative, about the value of perpetrator interventions also were discussed. On the positive side, one participant

stated, "I was just, thought if there would be some way to help him to see things a little differently maybe he wouldn't go into a group, but I don't know what's available." However, suggestions about intervening with the perpetrator usually were countered with the strong belief that this type of intervention could backfire and be dangerous to the victim: "Someone mentioned speaking to Al. But if the social worker really wanted to talk to Al, Al would be very angry with Florence and probably become more abusive because she told somebody." The motivation for suggesting the intervention with Al seemed to differ across the focus groups; the motivation in the Latina groups seemed to be helping Florence and Al as part of their marriage, whereas the motivation in the other groups was to help Florence by improving Al's treatment of her.

In addition to perpetrator interventions, focus-group participants also suggested that someone such as the senior center worker, a psychologist, or a minister should counsel both Florence and Al together. In some cases, having the senior center worker talk with both Florence and Al was recommended before reporting the situation to APS, while some other participants recommended this as an intervention by the APS worker. In the African American and Caucasian groups, this recommendation seemed to be based on the desire to help Florence, rather than to preserve their marriage. In contrast, the Latina groups' recommendation that Florence and Al be counseled together appeared to be based on their strong feelings about the importance of marriage.

The social worker should call them, the two of them first. And consult them before going to the law. Because the law is more serious. . . . Always taking into consideration that they've been husband and wife for 40 years.

In general, there was a greater focus in the Latina groups on improving the health of the couple and family in comparison with the non-Latina focus groups, which focused only on improving the safety and independence of the victim. For example, one participant in the Latina group stated:

She needs to communicate more with her husband. That's half the problem. Because the problems of a marriage, whether it's one or the other, are of oneself. You know, the two need to resolve their problem, one with the other.

There was a clear identification of the scenario as depicting a classic abusive or domestic violence relationship.

This is a classic example of abuse. Not just elderly, but the whole marriage. He makes her feel like it's her fault. She's accepting the fact that,

"If I were better, it wouldn't happen this way. And he's going to apologize and it won't happen again." And then five minutes later, it might happen again. It's a classic case.

Additionally, the working-class focus groups, and particularly the Latina focus groups, described personal experiences with domestic violence—either having knowledge of a friend or neighbor's abuse, or experiencing abuse themselves. As one participant stated, "When I was quite young, shortly after I married, in this same house, in a separate apartment, where I was living—this girl's husband beat her every Friday. Beat her unmercifully every Friday."

Participants in the Latina focus groups indicated that violent partnerships were so common as to be normative within their cultural setting. Although the majority viewed Florence as a victim in need of assistance and empowerment, some participants in the Latina groups expressed more traditional views of marriage in which the wife's role is to please and serve her husband, and placed a degree of blame on Florence. This more traditional view did not necessarily place blame on Al for his actions, and it placed a higher value than the other groups did on preserving and improving the well-being of the family unit; participants in the other groups, in contrast, were solely concerned with the victim's well-being. Participants in the Latina groups also talked about the value and importance of endurance, particularly the ability to endure abuse. Finally, the Latina groups offered suggestions about interventions ranging from working to preserve their marriage to suggestions that there is no need to remain in an abusive relationship. The attitudes of accepting and enduring abuse seen in the Latina groups were particularly in contrast to the high SES African American group, which espoused less traditional views of marriage and emphasized empowering the victim to know that she is not at fault and does not need to be in an abusive relationship.

Within-group themes included the importance of the church community in addressing elder maltreatment, described by one of the working-class African American focus groups, and the suggestion within one of the working-class Caucasian focus groups that some cultures have more abuse than others.

Involuntary protective services dilemma. Scenario 2 illustrates the involuntary protective services dilemma (see Table 7 for a listing of major themes across focus groups and Table 8 for a summary of trends across ethnicity and SES categories). The groups were unanimous in their support for an involuntary protective service intervention (hospitalization for assessment and treatment). As one participant stated, "If it's in this bad of shape, I cannot understand why something can't be done socially and legally right away." However, participants also emphasized the need for Vera's informal network, such as her neighbors, to look out for her and shock that neighbors

SCENARIO 2 Involuntary Protective Services

"Vera" Involuntary Protective Services Scenario

On a hot summer day the elder abuse hotline receives a call from a police officer. Neighbors have called the police out of their concern for an 86-year-old woman named Vera and her dog. Vera and her dog are dependent on the neighbors for water because the plumbing in Vera's house does not work. These neighbors have not seen Vera or her dog for several days and are worried that she and the dog have died. The police enter the unlocked house to check on Vera. They are barely able to walk through the house because it is piled floor-to-ceiling with trash. As the police make their way through the house, they hear the angry voice of an elderly woman calling to them from the second floor, "Who is in my house? Get out!" The police proceed up the stairs, which are slippery with trash, to the second floor where they find Vera who seems to be dehydrated. It is obvious that there is no working toilet in the house, and that Vera and her dog are using the floor and newspapers instead. The police report the condition to the elder abuse hotline and ask whether they can hospitalize the protesting woman against her will. Social workers investigate the situation and report that although Vera is clearly unusual, she seems to be rational.

TABLE 7 Major Themes for Involuntary Protective Services Dilemma

Major theme	AA1	AA2	Cau1	Cau2	Lat1	Lat2	*AA	*Cau
1. Support for an involuntary protective service order	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Awareness of similar cases	X	X		X	X		X	
3. Public health concerns		X	X				X	X
4. Concern for Vera's dog	X		X	X	X	X		X
5. Support for trial period of returning home	X	X	X	X		X		X
6. Vera is not rational	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. Role of age			X	X	X	X		
8. Prevention theme	X	X				X	X	
9. Neighbor theme		X		X	X		X	X

Note. AA = the working-class African American focus groups; Cau = the Caucasian focus groups; Lat = the Latina focus groups; *AA = the high SES African American focus group; *Cau = the high SES Caucasian focus groups.

hadn't been doing so already. Participants often related this point to their own lives in describing ways in which their friends and neighbors look out for one another.

I live alone, and I look for her [participant's friend]. I live on the 9, she lives downtown, I go and I knock on the door, if I don't see her, I

TABLE 8 Summary of Major Themes for Involuntary Protective Services Dilemma Across Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Major theme	Summary of major theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic status
1. Support for an involuntary protective service order	No differences across ethnicity or SES apparent; the support for an involuntary protective service order was universal.
2. Awareness of similar cases	This theme was important across ethnicity and SES categories. (Theme present in five groups total.)
3. Public health concerns	Public health concerns were stated within both high SES groups, but within neither of the Latina groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
4. Concern for Vera's dog	Concern for Vera's dog was apparent across SES and ethnicity categories. (Theme present in six groups total.)
5. Support for trial period of returning home	A trial period of returning home with ongoing nurse and/or social worker support; posthospitalization was supported in all six groups that discussed this possibility; no differences across ethnicity or SES apparent.
6. Vera is not rational	No differences across ethnicity or SES apparent; participants universally expressed belief that Vera is not rational.
7. Role of age	Arguing for Vera's advanced age as in itself a basis for intervention occurred within both Latina and working-class Caucasian groups, but within none of the working-class African American or high SES groups. The role of age in warranting intervention seemed to be particularly accepted in the Latina focus groups. (Theme present in four groups.)
8. Prevention theme	Theme mentioned within all three African American focus groups. (Theme present in four groups total.)
9. Neighbor theme	No differences across ethnicity or SES apparent. (Theme present in five groups total.)

knock on the door. And I go to look for her because if I haven't seen her all day, I go and I check on her. She also comes to my place. . . . If I don't see her in the morning when I'm waiting for the bus when it comes, I think, oh what could have happened to her, I go and I knock on the door, and she says, "Oh I'm ready," and I say, "Oh, that's good, let's go!"

A related point expressed by participants was an emphasis on prevention, the belief that protective action should have taken place much earlier to prevent the situation from becoming so severe: "You can't wait. In these cases, you've got to do it quickly—to avoid the problems that will surface afterwards."

The high SES focus groups were the only groups to describe an appreciation for the importance of protecting older persons' autonomy in decision making, despite favoring the autonomy-removing involuntary protective service order in this particular scenario. While participants across the groups supported an involuntary protective service order for hospitalization and

treatment, they also were supportive of a trial period of Vera returning to her home, with support and assistance from a nurse or social worker.

They find her—as this says that she still has her faculties and she's fine, well look—they should find someone to fix her house, or find her a room somewhere, and they should send her a social worker, a nurse, whomever, to check up on her.

Although the case was intended to illustrate a “gray” situation of marginal client capacity, participants strongly and unanimously believed that the victim was clearly incompetent.

But you can tell that Anna [Vera] is not well, because if she was of sound mind, she would have broken a window, thrown stuff out the window, so that the neighbors would come to help her . . . you can tell that she's not well.

The strong support for the involuntary protective service intervention stemmed not only out of concerns for Vera's welfare, but also out of public health considerations (e.g., vermin, fire) that could impact neighbors, and concerns about property values, Vera's age, and the dog in the scenario. As one participant stated, “They don't say it's rats and stuff, but I mean, you hear about that all the time—that there are vermin and everything running in and out of the house into other people's property.” Some participants argued for the need for intervention on the basis of Vera's age (86), while other participants suggested that it is ageist to use one's age as the basis for removing one's civil liberties via an involuntary protective service order.

Participant: Just the fact that she was 86 years old . . .

Moderator: What does, what does that mean . . .

Participant: That means she really needs help from a social worker.

Other participant: Yeah, well . . . just because she's 86 years old doesn't mean she's incompetent.

Participants also argued for the need for intervention out of concern for Vera's dog: “The police is supposed to take her [i.e., to the hospital] for her health and that of the dog. The dog needs to be cared for, too.”

A number of participants were aware of situations such as the one depicted in this case. In discussing this case and the situations they knew of, participants strongly expressed the view that it is advisable to act early and deal with a smaller, manageable problem as a means of preventing a situation from escalating out of control. Participants strongly espoused the importance of neighbors and others in one's social network to look out for one another

and seek help on behalf of persons within the network if needed. One of the African American working-class focus groups especially cited the importance of God and the church community in preventing elder maltreatment.

Together, the participants' support for mandatory reporting and involuntary protective services indicates that they clearly resolved the underlying freedom versus protection dilemma by favoring protection. Participants emphasized formal and informal methods of protection through intervention in both scenarios. Regardless of whether they favored mandated reporting, participants advocated for protection of the victim within her informal network of friends, family, church, and/or senior center. In the involuntary protective services scenario, participants were unanimous in their support for protection through an involuntary protective service intervention, although they also emphasized the need for involvement from within her informal network.

QUESTION THREE: HOW DOES A SAMPLE OF OLDER WOMEN PERCEIVE
THE DILEMMA OF CRIMINALIZING ELDER MALTREATMENT?

Scenario 3 illustrates the criminalization dilemma (see Table 9 for a listing of major themes across the focus groups and Table 10 for a summary of trends across ethnicity and SES categories). The majority of participants in all eight focus groups agreed that criminal prosecution was appropriate in this case. Participants provided a variety of reasons for supporting prosecution, including a desire to punish the perpetrators, to protect John from harm, to use prosecution to send a societal message and create a social deterrent, and the general view that the decision to prosecute should rest with

SCENARIO 3 Criminalization

"John" Criminalization Scenario

John is a 77-year-old man who lives in the attic of his daughter and son-in-law's house. His family is living off of his social security check each month. When John's friends and other relatives try to visit him, his daughter and son-in-law send them away, saying that he is not feeling well and doesn't want visitors. Eventually, however, when the police are called to the home for other reasons, they discover John in the attic. He is found lying in a urine-soaked blanket. The police call an ambulance that takes John to the hospital. A medical exam reveals that he is severely malnourished. A wound on his finger has been festering in a crude bandage, and his finger will have to be amputated. Although John is quite disoriented, he indicates his reluctance to have criminal charges brought against his daughter and son-in-law.

TABLE 9 Major Themes for Criminalization Scenario

Major theme	AA1	AA2	Cau1	Cau2	Lat1	Lat2	*AA	*Cau
1. Majority in favor of prosecution	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Awareness of similar cases	X	X	X	X	X			
3. This case is particularly disturbing	X		X	X		X		
4. Dissenting views opposing prosecution				X	X	X		X
5. Views about daughter's culpability if she also were abused	X	X	X			X	X	X
6. Views about sentencing		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. Intervening to help John		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. AA = the working-class African American focus groups; Cau = the Caucasian focus groups; Lat = the Latina focus groups; *AA = the high SES African American focus group; *Cau = the high SES Caucasian focus groups.

TABLE 10 Summary of Major Themes for Criminalization Dilemma Across Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Major theme	Summary of major theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic status
1. Majority in favor of prosecution	Theme present across ethnicity and SES categories; majority of participants in all eight focus groups support prosecution.
2. Awareness of similar cases	Both working-class African American and Caucasian groups described knowledge of similar cases; participants in recently arrived Latina group described knowing many similar cases. (Theme present within five groups.)
3. This case is especially disturbing	Both working-class Caucasian groups said it was the most disturbing scenario. (Theme present within four groups.)
4. Dissenting views opposing prosecution	Both Latina focus groups had dissenting views opposing prosecution, whereas none of the African American groups had dissenting views opposing prosecution. (Theme present with four groups.)
5. Views about daughter's culpability if she also were abused	No differences across ethnicity or SES apparent; majority of groups to discuss issue feel that daughter would still be guilty even if she were also abused. (Issue discussed within six groups.)
6. Views about sentencing	Most groups favor incarceration. The reasons for opposing incarceration differed between the Latina and non-Latina focus groups, with the Latina participants putting a greater emphasis on preserving the family.
7. Intervening to help John	The Latina focus groups placed a greater emphasis on interventions to help John, which would preserve the family.

society—via the district attorney's office—and should not be a burden placed on the victim. Reflecting some of these views, one participant stated:

I think that the state has the right to protect seniors or people who are incompetent to help themselves. Also, these are so publicized

that if one victim is kept a victim and the people get away with it, other people will be doing it.

Participants were generally undeterred by the fact that the perpetrators were John's children or by his reluctance to prosecute. Despite the majority agreement across the eight groups about the need to prosecute, some participants within several of the groups argued against prosecution. Support for prosecution was particularly strong in the African American focus groups, while a sizeable and vocal minority of participants in the Latina groups expressed reluctance about prosecution. Reluctance to prosecute was mainly because of the impact it might have on John and the family unit, and the familial relationship between the perpetrators and victim. One participant expressed this view succinctly in stating, "blood is blood, I'm sorry."

Participants also suggested the possibility that John's daughter might have been abused by her husband (John's son-in-law). Most groups agreed that the daughter still would be culpable, even if she also had been abused by her husband.

If she were abused and even if she had been abused it would not be an excuse for her to allow somebody else who is near and dear to her to be abused just because she didn't have any backbone. So in other words, this is a good thing for society to say, "Now wait a minute, abuse not only affects the person being abused; it can also have a ripple effect and other people can suffer, too."

Although most groups agreed that the daughter would still be culpable even if she had also been abused, participants in the Latina and working-class Caucasian focus groups had somewhat mixed opinions on this, based on the idea that she might have been too afraid to take action to help her father.

Participants emphasized the importance of intervening to provide care and protection for John, regardless of whether they favored prosecution. One participant expressed concern for John in stating:

But of course Juan [John] is not well cared for, and there should be someone who makes, who reports this case, so that they take him from the house and take him to a place where he can live more relaxed and differently, right?

The Latina and non-Latina focus groups differed in their suggested interventions to help John, with the Latina focus groups placing a greater emphasis on interventions that would preserve the family. The importance of God and the church community in helping to prevent abuse was again mentioned within one of the working-class African American focus groups.

Although the great majority of the participants agreed that prosecution was warranted, they did not all agree about *how* those prosecuted should be sentenced. Seven groups discussed sentencing and six of these specifically discussed incarceration. Of the six groups that discussed incarceration, the majority of the participants in five groups favored incarceration for the family perpetrators, although all five groups had dissenting minority views opposing incarceration. Participants in one focus group favored incarceration for the son-in-law only and some other form of sentencing for the daughter because of the daughter being John's child. The rationale for favoring incarceration included the desire to punish the perpetrators, to send a message to the community, to protect John, and to rehabilitate the family perpetrators. Opposition to incarceration often was motivated by the desire to spare John the pain of believing that he had sent his children to prison, a belief that incarceration is largely ineffective, and that an alternative sentence would be more effective and productive. The Latina participants who opposed incarceration also seemed motivated to prevent John pain as a result of his children being sent to prison as well as by the desire to preserve the family. Although the majority of high SES African American focus-group participants favored incarceration, a significant minority opposed it because of distrust of the criminal justice system and its historic inequities and injustice. Suggested alternatives to incarceration included restitution, counseling, court-ordered community service, or forcing perpetrators to pay for care.

As in the other scenarios, some participants described familiarity with situations such as this case, which involved financial abuse and caregiver neglect; however, none of the high SES focus groups described personal awareness of situations like the case scenario. One participant described familiarity with this type of situation by stating, "I know of a case similar to that. Where this daughter is spending all her mom's money and her mom lives with her." The focus-group participants were especially disturbed by this case scenario because they could imagine themselves in the role of the victim. This view was expressed by one participant, who stated:

[This case] could have been either one of us. I mean because he was taking care of himself up to whatever point that put him up in the attic. And we're all coming here to the center and people are helping look out after us. But suppose for some reason the senility set in. Either one of us could be that person in the attic.

Yet participants within one of the working-class Caucasian groups again indicated the belief that elder maltreatment may be more likely to occur in some cultures than in others.

DISCUSSION OF OVERARCHING THEMES

A variety of overarching themes emerged in the data analysis. Overarching themes were defined as themes that occurred across four or more groups and two or more areas of the questioning route (see Table 11 for a review of the presence of overarching themes across focus groups and Table 12 for a summary of trends across ethnicity and SES categories).

Favoring protection over autonomy. Participants favored protection over autonomy in all three of the discussed scenarios; this theme was present across all of the focus groups. This theme was not only apparent in the first and second scenarios, which specifically addressed this dilemma, but also in participants' responses to the criminalization scenario, in which participants emphasized the need for protection of the elder and prosecution despite the survivor's reluctance. One participant, reflecting on the three discussed scenarios, stated, "Well, I guess what I'm trying to say here is, yeah, these people, like somebody said here—they all needed help, but didn't know that they needed it." The protection theme was implicitly present across all the groups through participants' strong belief in the need for various interventions across the three scenarios. This theme was even emphasized among the minority of participants who did not favor mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, and/or criminalization in the study's three scenarios. Even when participants did not favor these more formal methods of intervention, they stated that something should be done to protect the individuals described in the scenarios, offering suggestions related to more informal intervention strategies (e.g., utilizing senior center, church, and existing family, friendship, and neighbor networks). The high SES groups expressed a philosophical appreciation for both autonomy and protection despite favoring protection in the discussed scenarios.

Prevention and early intervention. The prevention and early intervention theme involved comments about the value of either preventing maltreatment entirely or intervening early enough to prevent it from escalating

TABLE 11 Overarching Themes

Overarching theme	AA1	AA2	Cau1	Cau2	Lat1	Lat2	*AA	*Cau
1. Favoring protection over autonomy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Prevention and early intervention	X	X		X		X	X	X
3. Neighbor theme	X	X		X	X		X	X
4. Family theme	X	X	X	X	X	X		
5. Views about APS and social workers	X	X	X	X			X	X
6. Then versus now			X	X	X		X	X
7. Knowledge of and experiences with elder maltreatment situations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Note. AA = the working-class African American focus groups; Cau = the Caucasian focus groups; Lat = the Latina focus groups; *AA = the high SES African American focus group; *Cau = the high SES Caucasian focus groups.

TABLE 12 Summary of Overarching Themes Across Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

Overarching theme	Summary of overarching theme across ethnicity and socioeconomic status
1. Favoring protection over autonomy	All of the groups favored protection in the scenarios presented, while the high SES focus groups indicated a philosophical appreciation for both autonomy and protection.
2. Prevention and early intervention	This theme was important across ethnicity and socioeconomic status categories. (Theme present in six groups total.)
3. Neighbor theme	This theme was important across ethnicity and socioeconomic status categories. (Theme present in six groups total.)
4. Family theme	Family was centrally important to the Latina focus groups, was important in the working-class African American and Caucasian focus groups, and was not emphasized at all in the high SES focus groups. (Theme present in six groups total.)
5. Views about APS and social workers	This theme occurred across ethnicity and socioeconomic status categories, with no apparent differences across categories in terms of positive or negative views about APS or social workers. (Theme present in six groups total.)
6. Then versus now	This theme was not emphasized within the working-class African American groups. (Theme present in five groups total.)
7. Knowledge of and experiences with elder maltreatment situations	Very little direct awareness described within the high SES focus groups, while the working-class African American and Caucasian groups indicated significant familiarity with these issues. Latina participants described domestic violence, neglect, and financial abuse as common experiences. (Theme present in seven groups total.)

out of control. This theme, therefore, may be viewed as an early manifestation of the protection theme. The need for prevention and early intervention typically arose in discussions about the perceived severity of the situations described in the three case scenarios. For example, in describing one of the scenarios, a participant stated, "But I think other friends and family members should've stepped in earlier. I mean, I think it was let go too far." Some participants suggested that an earlier form of intervention such as mandatory reporting might serve to prevent later, more extreme forms of intervention such as involuntary protective services or criminal prosecution. Thus, like the protection emphasis, the prevention theme seems to critique an emphasis on autonomy, in which problems must escalate out of control before intervention is permissible. Education and awareness were cited as strategies for preventing elder maltreatment, as was staying involved and connected with people within one's social network.

Neighbor theme. The neighbor overarching theme emphasizes people's responsibility to look out for and help one another. As one participant stated, "And the ones of us that are still able to function, well I guess we have an obligation to the ones that don't." This theme related to participants' emphasis on protection in its stress on the need for vulnerable people to be helped. It is also related to the prevention and early intervention theme because it emphasizes the value of a social network to offset the need for later, more dramatic formal network interventions.

Family theme. Similarly, the family overarching theme involved the importance of family members intervening in elder maltreatment situations. This theme also involved the view that families ought to be involved in the care of their elder relatives, and that it is maltreatment if they are not. This theme was described within six focus groups; only the high SES focus groups were silent on this issue. The strength of the family theme within the Latina focus groups was one of these groups' defining characteristics. An additional aspect of this theme was the finding that the Latina participants placed greater emphasis than did other participants on interventions intended to preserve and strengthen the family unit, and their comments about Vera particularly highlighted the belief that family members have a responsibility to care for their older relatives. As one participant stated, "To take control of her, call the family, and let the family know that they need to take her out and take her somewhere. To look for treatment." Thus, the Latina focus groups thought more about the scenarios from the perspective of the well-being of the entire family unit than did the non-Latina groups, which thought about the scenarios almost entirely from the perspective of the victim's well-being.

Views about APS and social workers. Throughout the study, participants added to the discussion many comments, both positive and negative, about social workers generally, and APS workers specifically. Positive views about social workers generally, and APS workers specifically, included confidence in their training, knowledge, and ability to be helpful and to conduct a subtle investigation that minimizes the likelihood of harm. Voiced more frequently, however, were comments describing skepticism about social workers and APS. One person, describing both positive and negative views of social workers, stated:

I had called her to ask her something about Medicaid, because hospitals are so greedy. . . . So, I consulted her about doing that, and had very good advice, so I've had a great experience with a social worker. Although, prior to that, I really didn't have the time of day for a social worker; I thought they were not that good, and they've made some terrible mistakes with children. Terrible.

Negative views about APS include: It lacks adequate funding, APS workers are overworked, clients frequently "fall through the cracks," government is

often not the best agent for solving interpersonal problems, APS services often backfire causing more harm than good, and often "less is more" in terms of interventions. It was also clear during discussions around the three scenarios that many participants across the groups were unfamiliar with APS. It is possible that skepticism and unfamiliarity with APS may have contributed to some participants' reluctance to go outside the informal network in the mandatory reporting scenario. This theme was present in all but the Latina focus groups.

Then versus now. This theme refers to a variety of comments about changes over time in the prevalence and awareness of domestic violence and elder maltreatment, as well as comments about families' changing role in caring for elderly relatives. It primarily reflects participants' comments that there is greater awareness of domestic violence and elder maltreatment, that women have more power in relationships with men, and that there are more resources to confront domestic violence now than in the past. As a participant in one of the working-class Caucasian focus groups stated:

I think, ah, things are more out there in the open now. None of this hiding things under the rug or in the closet. Bring things out. And I think women are more aggressive. They say we'll even have, they are in politics, elected now. One place I've read that women would be like ancient Egypt. They'd be the leaders, not the men. You know, so . . . things change.

Some participants suggested that domestic violence has become less prevalent as a result of these factors. As one participant stated:

Well I think that in the past there was a lot of abuse because the woman was less prepared, now the women have more opportunities, they prepare, and there is more information too, to help them. In the past they depended a lot on their husbands.

Some participants also suggested that domestic violence in late life may be a growing problem as the number of older, married couples increases. A different aspect of this theme involves criticism that families no longer take the same degree of responsibility for the care of their elderly relatives that they had in the past. These comments overlap with the theme of family, implying that family members ought to take responsibility for the care of their older relatives. The working-class African American focus groups were the only focus group category in which this theme did not appear; it was present within one or more focus groups in each of the other focus group categories (i.e., Latina, high SES, working-class Caucasian).

Knowledge of and experiences with elder maltreatment situations. Participants within seven of the focus groups described having knowledge of or experience with elder maltreatment situations similar to those depicted

in the three scenarios. Very little direct awareness of elder maltreatment was described within the high SES African American focus group, and none at all was described within the high SES Caucasian group. The working-class African American and Caucasian groups indicated significant familiarity with these issues. The Latina participants described domestic violence, neglect, and financial abuse as common experiences. In particular, the domestic violence depicted in the case of Florence resonated strongly with participants in the two Latina groups, many of whom described having survived similarly abusive relationships.

DISCUSSION

Comparison of Findings With Results of the Community Dialogue Series

The current study served to replicate, with a stakeholder audience, Anetzberger, Dayton and McMonagle's (1997) Community Dialogue Series on ethics and elder abuse. The Community Dialogue Series examined professional perspectives on a variety of dilemmas in elder abuse. The participants in the Community Dialogue Series and the current study's participants were quite similar in terms of their views about mandatory reporting and criminalization, but differed in their views about involuntary protective services. Participants in both the current study and the Community Dialogue Series generally supported reporting elder abuse, particularly when reporting would produce more good than not reporting. Participants in both also supported the criminalization of elder abuse in certain cases, and suggested that the benefit to the older adult should be assessed when considering whether to pursue criminalization. Finally, participants in both recommended that elder abuse be resolved within the family context; in the case of the Community Dialogue Series participants, this recommendation included support for prosecution to leverage treatment and services for a reluctant perpetrator family member.

There were noteworthy differences between participants from the Community Dialogue Series and participants in this study regarding reactions to the Vera (involuntary protective services) scenario, which was discussed in both studies. To the participants in the current study, this scenario was not a dilemma; Vera was clearly irrational, the need for an involuntary protective service order for hospitalization was obvious, and concerns about public health and animal welfare further validated this need. Furthermore, some participants believed that Vera's age (86) provided greater evidence of the need for an involuntary protective service order. In contrast, participants from the Community Dialogue Series placed a much greater emphasis on autonomy than did participants in the current study. For instance, the series guidelines stated that intervention should occur only after great deliberation,

including a thorough assessment of mental capacity, and that self-determination and individual rights should be preserved whenever possible. The guidelines also emphasized guarding against ageism, and the need for community education focused on self-determination and client rights. Finally, series guidelines stated that the primary responsibility is to the client and not to society, whereas in the current study, the participants' rationale for intervention included public health and animal welfare concerns.

Implications of the Study

Public perception research is a relatively new area in the elder abuse literature. This new stream of research has largely concerned questions about public definitions of elder abuse, with less attention paid to public views about the treatment of elder abuse and no specific attention given to the many ethical dilemmas associated with its treatment. This exploratory study begins to fill this gap and move this area of research in a new direction through its examination of older women's views about ethical dilemmas in APS. This study could be replicated with a number of new populations—for example, with men and with different age and cultural groups—to determine whether its findings are transferable across different settings. It would also be important to replicate this study using scenarios with varying degrees of severity to further explore the range of perceptions about the underlying dilemmas.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' DEFINITION OF ELDER MALTREATMENT

Participants in this study held a broad definition of elder maltreatment that included physical neglect, emotional neglect, physical abuse, verbal abuse, financial abuse, societal maltreatment, putting or abandoning an elder in a nursing home, maltreatment by family and strangers, and abuse within nursing homes. The participants' inclusion of societal maltreatment and maltreatment by strangers as aspects of elder maltreatment represents a greatly broadened definition of the problem in comparison with expert understandings, for example, the elder maltreatment taxonomy and definitions inductively developed by Hudson (1991) through a three-round Delphi survey with a national panel of elder maltreatment experts. However, with the exception of the high SES Caucasian focus group, none of the focus groups included self-neglect within their definition of elder maltreatment. This is noteworthy because the majority of cases reported to APS involve self-neglect (House Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care, 1990; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988). The broad range of elder maltreatment categories described by study participants is generally consistent with research examining public definitions of maltreatment (Hudson et al., 2000, 1999; Hudson & Carlson, 1999; Morgan et al., 2006). The emphasis given to verbal abuse and emotional

neglect by participants in this study has also been noted within other public perception research (Anetzberger, Korbin, & Tomita, 1996; Moon & Benton, 2000; Nandlal & Wood, 1997). The societal maltreatment theme emerging in this study is consistent with the societal abuse of elders category that emerged in research by Hudson and Carlson (1998). Although the major themes of putting or abandoning an elder relative in a nursing home did not emerge in other studies, larger issues of familial neglect and abandonment do appear in public perception research (Anetzberger et al., 1996; Hudson & Carlson, 1998; Nagpaul, 1997).

Two noteworthy patterns with respect to socioeconomic status in this study were that neither high SES group identified financial abuse or maltreatment by strangers. The latter finding may highlight that maltreatment by strangers may at least partially be based on socioeconomic status and immigrant status because none of the participants in the high SES group endorsed this theme, whereas participants in both of the Latina groups endorsed both themes. Given the little attention paid to SES within the elder maltreatment public perception literature, this study's investigation of SES can be considered a new contribution to the field.

It is noteworthy that the four working-class Caucasian and African American focus groups identified financial abuse as an aspect of elder maltreatment, while the high SES and Latina focus groups did not. The fact that the Latina participants did not identify financial abuse as an aspect of elder maltreatment is consistent with research that found that Mexican American elders did not identify elder parents providing adult children with money or other resources to be exploitative (Sanchez, 1999). Although the Latina participants in the current study had less economic security than those in the high SES groups, these participants also brought a particularly strong family emphasis to their discussions. This strong familial orientation may involve a more communitarian approach to family resources, which also has been noted in other groups such as Asian Indians (Nagpaul, 1997).

The Caucasian groups had the fewest themes in common with one another. One commonality was that neither of the working-class Caucasian groups identified verbal abuse as an aspect of elder maltreatment. This is consistent with other research, which has found White elders to be more likely to tolerate verbal abuse than Korean or African American elders (Moon & Benton, 2000). Similarly, European American participants in research by Anetzberger, Korbin, and Tomita (1996) placed a stronger emphasis on psychological neglect (referred to as emotional neglect in the current study) than on psychological or verbal abuse.

The African American focus groups had more in common with each other than the Caucasian groups did. All three of the African American groups identified emotional neglect as an aspect of elder maltreatment, while only one of each of the Caucasian and Latina focus groups identified this aspect of neglect. Societal maltreatment and financial abuse appeared

especially important to the understanding of elder maltreatment among the working-class African American participants, while neither of these groups included physical abuse within their definition. Interestingly, while the high SES African American group identified grandparents raising grandchildren as a type of abuse of elder parents by adult children, the majority of Mexican American elders in research by Sanchez (1999) believed that parents are responsible for helping with care for grandchildren and do not consider this to be exploitative.

The Latina focus groups, in particular, stood out in their similarity to one another and their differences from other groups. Both Latina groups identified verbal abuse, maltreatment by strangers, and putting an elderly relative in a nursing home as aspects of elder maltreatment, while neither group identified financial abuse or societal maltreatment as aspects of maltreatment. In addition, the Latina participants appeared to have a somewhat greater tolerance for spousal abuse but less tolerance for putting a relative in a nursing home, than did the African American and Caucasian focus groups. It is possible that the Latina participants' differing tolerance for various forms of maltreatment may reflect, as immigrants, on their lesser degree of acculturation to the larger U.S. culture. Other research (Moon et al., 2001) has noted differences in perceptions of maltreatment between immigrant and American-born Asian groups. Maltreatment by strangers was a more prominent theme within the Latina focus groups than within other focus groups, perhaps reflecting maltreatment based on ethnicity, immigrant status, and/or socioeconomic status. The Latina focus groups were the only groups to identify placing an elderly family member in a nursing home as being abusive in and of itself. Similarly, in a different study, Mexican Americans included "denial of shelter" (denying an elderly parent a place to live on a long-term basis) within their definition of elder abuse (Sanchez, 1999). Finally, neither of the Latina focus groups identified societal maltreatment (e.g., maltreatment related to systems such as HMOs or Medicare) as an aspect of elder maltreatment despite the prominence of this theme within other focus groups. Perhaps the Latina focus-group participants did not include societal maltreatment within their definition because they were less familiar than other participants with U.S. systems to serve the elderly.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TO THE DILEMMAS

In this study, the participants' emphasis on family supports the value placed in the APS practice of maintaining the family unit (Anetzberger, 1988). The family and neighbor themes in this study support APS systems continuing to develop and expand collaborative intervention models that draw from, work with, and strengthen the victim's informal network (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, faith community). Culturally competent practice may mandate a particular effort toward working to improve family relationships

within Latino immigrant cultures, given the strong emphasis on family within the Latina focus groups in this study. Other research (Sanchez, 1999) also has noted a preference for informal sources (e.g., family) of intervention in elder maltreatment situations among Latinos of Mexico origin, reflecting the family theme seen in this study. These data further suggest that APS practice models should continue to be developed and expanded to encourage safety within the home when the victim does not wish to be separated from the perpetrator. At times, the target of intervention should be the perpetrator rather than the victim (Anetzberger, 2000). Treatment models aimed at preventing future abuse, rather than necessarily separating perpetrator and victim, could involve voluntary or court-ordered drug counseling, abuser groups, and/or counseling for abusers that could facilitate less dysfunctional victim-perpetrator interactions.

Participants in this study expressed both significant knowledge of or personal experiences with elder maltreatment and a general lack of familiarity with APS. The knowledge of or personal experience with elder maltreatment expressed by participants in this study is consistent with findings from other public perception research (Hudson, 1994). Yet, the focus-group participants' lack of familiarity with APS was a striking contrast to their awareness of elder maltreatment. The lack of familiarity with and negative views about APS indicated by many participants suggest the importance of APS systems devoting resources to public relations and public awareness campaigns. For instance, public relations departments could become standard features of APS programs, and these departments could both conduct public awareness/outreach campaigns and training efforts, as well as serve as a liaison to the community, including service providers. The importance of such efforts is highlighted by research indicating that public and professional awareness of elder maltreatment and confidence in public systems dealing with it are more important for case identification than are mandatory reporting laws (House Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care, 1990; Silva, 1992). Limited funding requires balancing prevention and public awareness efforts with direct practice. Participants' lack of familiarity with APS coupled with their emphasis on prevention and early intervention suggests that such prevention and public awareness efforts are indeed an important funding priority in APS systems. Such efforts can be partially offset by foundation and corporate grants, limiting the extent to which federal dollars must be leveraged for these purposes. An additional approach would be to team public awareness efforts with domestic violence agencies.

Violent and abusive male-female relationships appeared to be more common and culturally acceptable among the Latina immigrant participants in this study than among the African American and Caucasian participants, and they also appeared to have a stronger tendency to blame victims in the discussed scenarios. Interpersonal violence has been identified within other research (Bibiana Adames & Cambell, 2005) as an extensive problem within

immigrant Latino communities. Collaborative APS and domestic violence public awareness efforts could especially target such communities.

Public awareness efforts targeted to clergy may be especially significant in African American communities, given the emphasis within one of the working-class African American focus groups on the role of church and God in addressing elder maltreatment. Finally, although focus group participants espoused a broad definition of elder maltreatment, self-neglect was not included within this definition. This suggests the importance of including self-neglect within elder abuse and APS public awareness efforts.

This study suggests initial public support for mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, and elder maltreatment criminalization policies. Research by Hudson (1994) also has identified public comfort with intervening in elder maltreatment situations, as well as public support for the value of early intervention, although specific forms of intervention were not explored in this research. Participants in this study consisted of 99 North Carolina community-dwelling adults ages 40–91. The majority of participants expressed the need for professional intervention in response to behavioral vignettes describing a wide range of elder abuse situations, although specific forms of intervention were not explored. Participants in the Hudson study also expressed a consistent theme of the need to intervene early in response to elder abuse, with no one indicating reticence about professional intervention. Policy makers may feel more comfortable developing, maintaining, or expanding interventions and policies if further research continues to find public support for them. Continued evidence of public approval for mandatory reporting laws would add support for these laws among states that were considering adopting them, and it also might add support for states considering expanding categories of mandated reporters.

Participants in this study were unanimous about the need for involuntary protective services in the Vera scenario, partially on the basis of Vera's age. Other public perception research (Mouton et al., 2005) has found a willingness to limit autonomy on the basis of age. Probate court judges need to be aware of public opinion favoring involuntary protective services should future research continue to provide evidence of public support for these services in "gray" cases of indeterminate client capacity. However, the fact that participants did not consider this scenario to be a dilemma also suggests the importance of elder maltreatment education that emphasizes autonomy and nonageism.

The data from this study indicated a broad acceptance of criminal prosecution in certain cases. Johnson (1995) examined elders' and caregivers' views about criminalizing elder maltreatment, and reported more ambivalent feelings about criminalization than did participants in the current study. Although the majority of elders in Johnson's study supported passage of laws making elder abuse a misdemeanor or felony, they preferred to handle

elder abuse within the context of the family or social services than through the criminal justice system. In contrast, although the caregivers were less supportive than the elders of the passage of laws making elder abuse a misdemeanor or felony, they were more supportive than the elders of handling elder abuse within the context of the criminal justice system. The study sample consisted of elders age 62 or older and their caregivers in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. In contrast to the current study, there was a higher percentage of Caucasian subjects (83% of elder sample; 84.2% of caregiver sample) and a lower percentage of African American (14.9% of elder sample; 13.7% of caregiver sample) and Latino (2.1% of elders and caregivers) subjects in Johnson's study. Perhaps the more favorable views about criminalization in the current study relate to the framing of this issue as a dilemma, which forces a greater examination of core values and beliefs. Other research (Morgan et al., 2006) has found broad endorsement of criminal interventions in elder abuse among a general (i.e., not elder-specific) sample of adults in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Policy makers may feel more comfortable developing further approaches to criminalizing elder maltreatment should future research continue to find public support for it. Adult protective services departments could work to increase the criminal treatment of elder maltreatment in various ways. One possibility involves cross referencing relevant criminal codes within APS codes in states where this is not occurring. This would assist APS social workers in working with prosecutors to identify when cases are appropriate to handle criminally. Additionally, in some states, elder abuse and neglect reports go directly to APS and a law enforcement agency may not be involved. Increasing coordination and collaboration between APS and law enforcement is important to address the criminal aspect of cases that are referred to APS. Approaches to enhancing coordination and collaboration between law enforcement and APS include having a designated liaison from law enforcement available to consult on cases and/or conduct a joint investigation, or having outstationing prosecutors and police detectives within APS programs, or vice versa. Other approaches such as coordinating councils, multidisciplinary teams, and elder abuse forensic centers also may be used to increase the level of coordination and collaboration between law enforcement and APS (Nerenberg, 2006; Wiglesworth, Mosqueda, Burnight, Younglove, & Jeske, 2006). This approach could be implemented with or without adding criminal statutes and penalties to APS law.

Limitations of the Study

As exploratory research involving older women, this study has certain inherent limitations. For example, only women's perceptions were assessed and exploring men's perceptions would be important to more fully assess public understandings of elder maltreatment and the dilemmas examined in this

study. In addition, because of potential selection bias, participants in this study may have favored protective interventions more strongly than do older women in general. This study used a convenience sample of older women who were enthusiastic and devoted participants in a variety of social programs, including the senior centers where most of the focus groups were held. The high SES Caucasian focus group was held at an area Presbyterian church and was made up of participants who were active congregants at that church. The high SES African American focus group, held at the home of one of the group participants, also consisted of participants who were heavily involved in a variety of social programs and causes. Given the active involvement in social programs and services by participants across the focus groups, it is reasonable to wonder whether these participants may have had greater comfort with protective interventions than would older women who were not similarly involved.

Despite the potential selection bias of this active sample, the sample did possess a number of noteworthy strengths. Great effort was taken to find a sample that was diverse with respect to ethnicity and socioeconomic status, the latter a relatively unexplored variable in the literature. Further, two groups of each ethnicity and SES level were conducted to enhance saturation of data. Together, this indicates a sample with potential limitations and noteworthy strengths.

The first author was the primary moderator of the focus groups. All of the focus-group moderators and assistant moderators took extensive notes throughout the focus groups. Although taking notes during the focus groups could have potentially influenced the discussions in some way, this potential limitation is offset by the invaluable data sources gained through moderator and assistant moderator notes, which are used for triangulation of data. Standard focus-group moderating procedures call for all moderators and assistant moderators to take extensive notes during the focus-group process (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to our understanding of elder maltreatment and APS by examining public stakeholder views about the definition of the problem and appropriate responses to the problem. Specifically, it adds the valuable perspective of an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of older women with regard to the definition of elder maltreatment and views of ethical dilemmas and policy controversies in adult protective services. Although several studies have investigated perceptions of the definition of maltreatment, little is known about the impact of socioeconomic status on the definition of maltreatment. Furthermore, very little is known about public views of interventions in maltreatment, and particularly with regard to

perplexing policy controversies and dilemmas endemic to APS work. In addition to exploring three specific controversial policies (mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, and the criminal handling of elder maltreatment), this study also explores the larger autonomy and freedom versus beneficence and protection dilemma that underlies much of APS work. Participants across socioeconomic status and ethnicity categories were generally supportive of protective and criminal interventions, and thus were philosophically much more supportive of beneficence than autonomy in the discussed scenarios. Additional research with men and with a wider range of scenario severity, cultural groups, and ages would be important to further shed light on public views of ethical dilemmas and policy controversies in adult protective services.

Information gained through this and similar research provides a valuable perspective to policy makers developing and modifying APS policies. It is important for those who are creating policy not to do so in a vacuum—input and feedback from the larger public community can help ensure the soundness of developed policies. Although the public alone is not appropriate to decide policy concerns—we can easily bring to mind a variety of topics on which the general public may hold biased or incorrect beliefs—it is still a valuable perspective that deserves consideration by those in a policy-making position. Furthermore, it is comforting to have a hint that the public may support mechanisms such as mandatory reporting, involuntary protective services, and criminal prosecution, which have been developed to protect and support vulnerable and harmed older adults.

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