

Running head: ELDER ABUSE

Elder Abuse: A Feminist Perspective

by

Susan J. Crichton

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
in the Department of Family Studies
Faculty of Human Ecology
University of Manitoba

(c) March, 1998



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-32086-3

Canada

ELDER ABUSE: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

BY

SUSAN J. CRICHTON

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of**

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Susan J. Crichton © 1998

**Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
to lend or sell copies of this thesis, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this
thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and LIBRARY MICROFILMS to publish an
abstract of this thesis.**

**The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive
extracts from it may be printed or other-wise reproduced without the author's written
permission.**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

I authorize the University of Manitoba to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Susan Crichton

I further authorize the University of Manitoba to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Susan Crichton

The University of Manitoba requires the signatures of all persons using or photocopying this thesis. Please sign below, and give address and date.

Abstract

Research reviewed regarding elder abuse indicates that there is little consensus surrounding the variables of gender, age and incidence. This project analyzed 99 incidents of elder abuse by an adult child and 86 incidents of elder abuse by a spouse, and compared the groups using the variables, gender, age, and incidence. The results were analyzed and discussed using a feminist perspective. The results indicated that there are differences between the groups, and that traditional ideas about women and men, as well as ideas about the nature of the old are factors in elder abusive relationships. Directions for further research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the successful completion of this thesis.

Thank -you to the members of my committee: To Dr. John Bond for sharing his knowledge and expertise in the field of elder abuse. His guidance, support and accessibility have been invaluable. To Dr. Carol Harvey, for her support and encouragement. Her positive attitude provided strong motivation. To Dr. Janice Ristock for sharing her expertise on feminist issues. She has taught me a great deal.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their constant support and patience. In particular I would like to thank my mother, Nora Crichton, for her encouragement and understanding through the struggles. She believes in me which makes me believe in myself. I would also like to thank my father, Vince Crichton for his inspiration and motivation to pursue graduate studies. His constant support has been a shining light.

A special thanks to Kieran Savage for his never-ending support, patience and expertise with the technical issues.

Finally, I would like to thank the Age and Opportunity, Elder Abuse Resource Centre, in particular Gloria Dixon and Maria Waselkewycz, who allowed me to

use the centre files to complete my data collection,
making this study possible.

Thank-you.

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	5
1. Introduction	6
2. General Introduction to Elder Abuse Research	6
3. Literature Review	10
3.0.0 Gender and Elder Abuse	13
3.0.1 Age and Elder Abuse	17
3.0.2 Categories of Elder Abuse	18
4. Theoretical Framework	20
5. Statement of Problem	32
6. Hypotheses	34
7. Method	37
7.0.0 Description of Sample	37
7.0.1 Research Design	38
8. Results	39
9. Discussion	43
10. Conclusion	59
Summary	60
References	64
Appendices	70

Elder Abuse: A Feminist Perspective

Research regarding elder abuse is relatively recent for both academics and practitioners. In fact, the first reference in academic literature to elder abuse was in 1975 in the British Medical Journal and was termed "granny-battering" (Wolf, 1988). Throughout the past two decades interest in discovering and explaining the dynamics involved in elder abusive relationships has increased substantially. There have also been examinations of policies and legislation regarding the protection of the abused elderly and whether there should be mandatory reporting of elder abuse.

General Introduction to Elder Abuse Research

The prevalence (how much it occurs in the population) of elder abuse has been widely reported by several investigators (McDonald, Hornick, Robertson and Wallace, 1991; Maclean, 1995; Wolf, 1988). Estimates of prevalence of elder abuse range from 4% to 10% of elderly populations (Wolf, 1988). Estimating the incidence (reported cases) of elder abuse and neglect is a problem because there is no consensus on definitions associated with the term elder abuse. McDonald et al. (1991) noted that while one to four percent of elderly Canadians are reportedly abused,

many practitioners regard this as a very conservative estimate. McDonald et al. also recognized that as the elderly population continues to increase rapidly over the next several decades as the population continues to age and family structures change, elder abuse and neglect will almost assuredly increase.

The four categories of elder abuse commonly recognized include physical abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse and neglect. The incidence of each of the four categories of abuse is another issue of concern. One Canadian study found that financial abuse was the most widely reported category of abuse, followed by psychological abuse and physical abuse. Neglect was the least frequent category reported (Neysmith, 1995).

Individuals delivering programs which intervene in situations of elder abuse and neglect confront many obstacles in the pursuit of appropriate strategies. Nahmiash (1995) recognizes that "one of the main problems that Canadian practitioners have experienced as they develop models for intervening on abuse and neglect of seniors is the dearth of conclusive research on intervention" (p. 3). McKenzie, Tod and Yellen (1995) also note particular problems that arise in the development of programs and approaches to address elder abuse. They state that the continual assertion of

professionals and practitioners that elder abuse is indeed a serious problem has inspired a variety of community-based programs and services for mistreated older adults. The problems encountered in the development of these programs are that "the developers of community models have been constrained, however, by the lack of comprehensive information in the literature of family violence and gerontology " (p. 17). It is also recognized that relatively little has been published about the extent, nature and outcomes of abuse and neglect of seniors (McKenzie et al., 1995). In addition to the lack of basic and programmatic research, there has been an expansion of theories which explain elder abuse. Early research focused on the "caregiver stress" model of elder abuse (Pillemer, 1985). This described the abuser as an overburdened caregiver, experiencing high stress while performing caregiving duties to an older individual. The consequence was that stress was released in the form of elder abuse.

More recently it has been suggested that the "caregiver stress" theory is not the most appropriate model to explain elder abuse. Recent literature recognizes that often the perpetrator of the abuse is dependent on the elderly person (Fulmer, 1990). Greenberg, McKibben, and Raymond (1990) found that

abusers of the elderly are often dependent on the victim for housing, transportation and financial assistance. It is also recognized that abusers often suffer from mental health problems and alcoholism (Greenberg et al., 1990).

Theoretical conflict in the literature and the dearth of information regarding the prevalence, incidence, nature and outcomes of elder abuse indicate the need for research which addresses the concerns and conflicts that exist. No research exists which compares abuse of the elderly by a child to abuse by a spouse. Gender and age of the abuser and victim are important variables to understand the events.

This study compared elder abuse committed by a spouse to that committed by an adult child. The variables of interest included the gender of the perpetrator and the victim, the age of the perpetrator and the victim and the incidence of each of the four categories of abuse commonly recognized, including physical abuse, financial abuse, psychological abuse and neglect.

The research addressed some of the gaps in the literature regarding the nature and incidence of elder abuse. Recognizing the differences and/or similarities in cases of elder abuse by an adult child and by a spouse can guide the organization and implementation of

appropriate services.

Feminist theory was used in the current project. Abuse involves the oppression of one individual and the exaggeration of power of another individual and is related to gender. Feminist theory served to explain and analyze this power relationship.

The project analyzed incidents of elder abuse that were substantiated by a community agency. Data were extracted from charts of abuse by a child or spouse, analyzed and interpreted from a feminist perspective.

Literature Review

Before one begins to address ideas related to elder abuse, it is important to recognize some of the problems associated with the research. Many findings of elder abuse research have been hampered by the newness of the concept, the inviolate nature of the family and the difficulty in obtaining data about such sensitive, value-laden issues (Hudson, 1989). The findings have also been limited by a lack of clarity about what constitutes elder mistreatment and the lack of any definitional consensus. As Wolf (1990) noted, from the beginning of the scientific investigation of elder abuse, definitions have been a controversial matter. Fulmer (1990) further recognized "the importance of operationalizing terms so that all players start out on

a level playing field" (p. 70).

McDonald et al. (1991) stated that most social researchers have differentiated between physical abuse and psychological or verbal/emotional abuse in defining elder abuse. Neglect is another category of elder abuse that is included by many authors. Some researchers differentiate between active and passive neglect and others include self abuse and self neglect. As McDonald et al. (1991) recognized, "the end result is that dissimilar phenomena have been subsumed under the concept of elder abuse" (p. 3).

Hudson (1989) stated that typically the definitions of elder abuse have been limited to mistreatment in which the adult is 65 years of age or older and is abused and/or neglected by a family member or informal caregiver. Wolf (1988) recognized several definitions that have been provided by various authors. These definitions include: "a state of self-inflicted or other-inflicted suffering unnecessary to the maintenance of the quality of life of an older person" (p. 762), "actions of a caretaker that create unmet needs for the elderly persons" (p. 762), and "the failure of an individual responsible for caretaking to respond adequately to established needs for care" (p. 762).

Maclean (1995) also addressed definitional

problems. He recognized that presently there is no consensus on the issue of elder abuse, and this is a significant problem for research related to the mistreatment of seniors. It is important to recognize that although the definitions of elder abuse are varied they are all focused on the same phenomenon: the fact that older individuals are abused and neglected in diverse ways (Maclean, 1995).

While many variables have been studied in relation to elder abuse (e.g. dependency, income, living arrangements) the variables of gender and age are crucial; therefore, the literature review will focus on these particular variables. The incidence of elder abuse will also be considered.

Gender is an important variable to explore because it provides a starting point for recognizing those who may be most vulnerable to elder abuse. Gender is also important in understanding the dynamics of elder abusive relationships. The socialization of males and females has been carefully examined in recent years (Boss et al., 1993), and gender could serve as an explanatory variable in terms of power in elder abuse relationships.

Age is important because it acknowledges those individuals who may be most vulnerable to abuse (e.g. the young-old [60-75] versus the old-old [75+]). It has

also been acknowledged that ageism, or negative attitudes toward the aged, may be a factor in elder abuse situations (McDonald et al., 1991).

The category of elder abuse is also an important variable to consider. To compare elder abuse by an adult child to that by a spouse, it is important to determine whether one particular category of elder abuse is reported more frequently in either group. If there is evidence that one category occurs more frequently it must be considered when implementing services geared toward the individual situation.

This review of literature will next examine gender as it relates to elder abuse followed by a collaboration of findings regarding elder abuse and the age of the perpetrator and victim. The incidence of elder abuse will also be reviewed.

Gender and Elder Abuse

An overview of the literature will be provided as it relates to the perpetrator of elder abuse. Filinson and Ingman (1989) found the profile of the perpetrator of to be an adult offspring, further defined as a "... middle-aged man, Catholic, unmarried, high school educated and working as an operator or labourer to earn a moderate annual income; he abuses his natural mother with whom he has lived for several years and who is very old with both physical and mental impairments" (p.

138). The abuse is often physical, including pushing, grabbing, shoving, shaking, throwing things, and slapping.

Bond, Penner and Yellen (1995) found middle-aged sons to be the most common abusers. To further support this point another study by Godkin, Wolf and Pillemer (1989) found that the largest proportion of abusers in their study were either husbands or sons.

Sharon (1991) also supported the preceding profile of the abuser as she noted that spouses and sons have been identified as a higher risk than daughters. This study also found that in substantiation of elder abuse cases (the positive determination at the end of an investigative process that aims to validate alleged claims of abuse and/or neglect associated with a case), the most common groups were abusing sons and other relatives (Sharon, 1991). The high rate for spousal substantiation is in line with theories that attribute abuse to the stress experienced by spouses, while high rates for sons may reflect doubts regarding their preparation for the role of caring for the elderly at risk. Those who work with abused older adults apparently accept the notion that daughters are better prepared to perform such a role (Sharon, 1991).

Korbin, Anetzberger and Eckert (1991) also conducted a study regarding mistreatment of older

adults by adult offspring. Although their sample was small, they found that in all except one case the adult offspring perpetrator was a son.

Some studies, however, found contrasting results. Miller and Dodder (1989) found that the perpetrator of elder abuse was most likely to be a daughter. Pierce and Trotta (1986) also found that women are most likely to abuse the elderly due to the fact that women are most often primary caregivers. Miller and Dodder (1989) found in particular that when abuse and neglect are separated, women are most likely to be the perpetrators of neglect.

There are differing opinions of gender as it relates to the victims of elder abuse. Kosberg (1988) stated that since there are more older women than older men, there are more abused older women, who are less likely to resist abusive behaviour. Mitchell and Smyth (1994) found the victim of elder abuse is typically a female because women outnumber men two to one in old age and in the 75 years and older group it is three to one. Filinson and Ingman (1989) stated that the elder abuse victim is most often female, white, and 75 or older.

Aronson, Thornewell and Williams (1995) indicated that older women are generally of low status, are powerless and tend to be emotionally, physically or

financially dependent and therefore are likely to be victims of violence. Sharon (1991) stated that while elderly males are perceived to be less vulnerable to abuse by others but more vulnerable to self neglect, the opposite is true for female victims.

In opposition to these ideas, Hyde-Robertson, Pirnie and Freeze (1994) found that men are at higher risk of elder abuse than women. Pittaway, Westhues and Peressini (1995) suggested that current knowledge indicates that men are subjected to physical abuse as often as women when the ratio of older men to women is taken into consideration.

To neutralize the preceding arguments, Pittaway, Westhues and Perresini (1995) found that neither gender nor living arrangements are significantly associated with any form of abuse. Recent studies show the profiles of abused persons to be different depending on the type of abuse or neglect (Pittaway & Westhues, 1993).

It is clear that there is discrepancy in the literature regarding gender and elder abuse. This illustrates the need for research that examines gender and elder abuse and that will uncover a clear pattern related to the gender of the victims and perpetrators of elder abuse.

Age and Elder Abuse

The next variable to be examined in relation to elder abuse is age. As identified earlier, there seems to be agreement that the elder abuse perpetrator is most often middle-aged, defined as between 35-50 years of age (Champlin, 1982; Filinson & Ingman, 1989).

The age of the elder abuse victim varies depending on the definition of elderly. The Elder Abuse Resource Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba recognizes a senior or elder as 60 years of age or over. There seems to be agreement that older seniors, those at least 75 years old, are particularly vulnerable to elder abuse (Champlin, 1982; Filinson & Ingman, 1989). Wolf (1990) stated that early investigators showed that victims of elder abuse were likely to be disproportionately female and "old-old". She recognizes that this old individual is an easy target for exploitation.

McDonald et al. (1991) also provided evidence regarding the age of abused seniors, indicating most victims were the very old. They were likely to be over 70 and, in many cases, between 75 and 85 years old (McDonald et al., 1991).

Pittaway et al. (1993) provided an analysis of the age of the victim of elder abuse related to the category of abuse. They found that in the 65 to 74 year old group, physical abuse was recorded most often. The

75 to 84 years old group, as well as the 85+ group, were found to experience neglect most often (Pittaway et al., 1993).

Categories of Elder Abuse

Pittaway and Westhues (1993) described some interesting findings regarding the incidence of elder abuse. Physical abuse was the most commonly reported category of elder abuse which was most often perpetrated by a spouse. The next most commonly reported category of elder abuse was chronic verbal aggression (psychological abuse), also perpetrated mostly by spouses. Material abuse was the third most commonly reported category of elder abuse, followed by neglect. There was no evidence provided as to whether the perpetrators of the latter two categories of abuse were mostly spouses or adult children.

Bond et al. (1995) found that neglect was the most commonly reported category of elder abuse, followed by financial and psychological abuse. Physical abuse was the least frequently reported category of elder abuse in the study.

Nahmiash (1995) reported the results of a Canadian study conducted in 1988. Financial abuse was the most commonly reported category, followed by chronic verbal aggression, physical abuse and neglect. The study also found that physical abuse is most commonly perpetrated

by spouses.

Pittaway et al. (1995) found that the incidence of elder abuse was dependent upon the age of the victim. It was reported that in the 65 to 74 year old group physical abuse was the most commonly reported category of abuse. The 75+ age group reported neglect as the most common form of elder abuse.

Clearly, the results one finds depend on the context in which one does research. All of the studies cited used different sampling techniques, as well as different research methods. For example, the study by Bond et al. (1995) used a survey that was distributed non-randomly to various professionals. The research done by Pittaway and Westhues (1995) used secondary data that was collected from surveys administered to clients. The work by Pittaway et al. (1995) used a combination of methods and data was provided by service providers as well as clients. Therefore, the results of each study produced different findings.

Overall, it is evident that there is much controversy surrounding the variables of gender, age, and incidence as they relate to elder abuse. It is evident that this controversy leaves many gaps that must be explored through further research. There have been no studies found that simultaneously examine the gender of the perpetrator, the gender of the victim,

age, and category of abuse. The literature reviewed illustrated the importance of addressing these variables to uncover the dynamics of elder abuse relationships.

Theoretical Framework

There are several theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain elder abuse. The situational model, social exchange theory and symbolic interaction are the models that have been used most frequently (Pittaway, Westhues & Peressini, 1995). The situational model supports the premise that if caregivers are stressed they may become abusive towards their older vulnerable relatives (Pittaway et al., 1995). Social exchange theory is based on the principle of distributive justice which includes an exchange of rewards and punishments. This theory provides an analysis of power differentials between relationships (Pittaway et al., 1995). The symbolic interactionist approach refers to social learning and modeling which is established through patterns of interaction and a process of constant negotiation and renegotiation (Pittaway et al., 1995).

The literature reviewed recognizes the importance of including gender and age as variables when attempting to analyze and explain elder abuse. Although the theories cited have proven useful in analyzing

certain aspects of abusive elder relationships they are limited in terms of recognizing the importance of gender and age as explanatory variables.

The theoretical framework used to guide and interpret the current project was a feminist perspective. Goldner (1993) describes feminist theory as an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of understanding how to change it. Some of the central themes include: an emphasis on women and their experiences; a recognition that under existing social arrangement women are subordinated; there is a commitment to ending that unjust subordination; and finally there is specific attention to gender and gender relations as fundamental to all of social life, including the lives of men as well as those of women.

With gender as a basic organizing concept feminist theories emphasize the social construction and exaggeration of differences between women and men. It is recognized that these distinctions are used to legitimize and perpetuate power relations between women and men. It is also stressed that gender relations are basically power relations. Compared to men, women are devalued and subordinated - socially, economically, politically and legally. Feminist theories view existing gender relations as unacceptable and in need of change (Goldner, 1993). This approach remains

closely tied to a social vision that defines its mission as the development of knowledge that will help confront and end the subordination of women and related patterns of subordination based on social class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (Goldner, 1993).

In terms of abuse, a feminist analysis provides for a broad view of the context of individual behaviour in the structural and institutional organization of a patriarchal and capitalist society. It usually sets wife-battering, or violence against wives, in its historical context: "what stands out most clearly when discussing wife abuse from a feminist perspective is the historical - legal precedent of males supremacy and the subordination of women in marriage and in society. The reasons men have historically beaten their wives originates from the belief that man has property rights over his partner" (Walker, 1990, p. 84). In return for economic dependence, women are expected to obey their husbands' demands; therefore, wife abuse is an extension of the social permission to control women (Walker, 1990).

Feminism sees violence as a reflection of unequal and oppressive power relations between the sexes. This is not just a matter of tradition or cultural values but is integral to the unequal social structure of society as a whole (Walker, 1990). Power is the

overriding issue to be addressed within the specific historical context in which abuse occurs. Feminists suggest that power relations must be recognized if the situation is to be properly understood (Walker, 1990). According to Walker "feminists were the first to analyze violence against women as part of the power dynamics operating between men and women in a sexist society" (p. 85).

There are several distinct approaches identified by feminist theorists. These include liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. The main thrust of liberal feminism is that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance and/or success in the so-called public world (Tong, 1989). To liberal feminists, "...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself" (Mills, 1978, p. 20). This approach suggests that there should be a principle of equality admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mills, 1978). Through the belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men, women are excluded from the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. Liberal feminists insist that "gender justice" requires us "to

make the rules of the game fair and to make certain that none of the runners in the race for society's goods and services is systematically disadvantaged" (Tong, 1989, p.2).

Marxist feminists think it impossible for anyone, especially women, to obtain genuine equal opportunity in a class society where the wealth produced by the powerless many ends up in the hands of the powerful few (Tong, 1989). They claim that women's oppression originated in the introduction of private property. Private ownership of the means of production by relatively few persons, originally all male, inaugurated a class system. According to Engel's writings (1978) the first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of antagonism between men and women in monogamous marriage and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex, by the male sex. With the patriarchal family, household management (women's sphere) lost its public character, it no longer concerned society, it became a private service and wives became head servants, excluded from all participation in social production. Further to this, Reed (1978) recognized that women's subordination did not come about through any biological deficiency as a sex. Instead, women's subordination was the result of revolutionary social

change which destroyed the equalitarian society and replaced it with a patriarchal class society which from its birth was stamped with discriminations and inequalities of many kinds, including the inequality of the sexes. The Marxist feminist approach suggests that the growth of this type of socioeconomic organization was responsible for the historic downfall of women (Reed, 1978).

Marxist feminists suggest that if all women are ever to be liberated, the capitalist system must be replaced by a socialist system in which the means of production belong to one and all. In other words, liberation for women would be reached by the achievement of a classless society (Reed, 1978). Under this system no one would be economically dependent on anyone else and women would be economically freed from men and therefore equal to them (Tong, 1989).

Radical feminists believe that women are oppressed by a patriarchal system, a system that is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition (Tong, 1989). To radical feminists, sex is a systematic division of social power, a social principle inseparable from the gender of individuals, enforced to women's detriment because it serves the interest of the powerful who are men (MacKinnon, 1989). "Sexism is not just a disparity to be leveled but a system of

subordination to be overthrown" (MacKinnon, 1989. p. 40). This is a system that cannot be reformed but only ripped out "root and branch" (Tong, 1989). Radical feminists believe that legal, political, social and cultural institutions must be overturned, especially the family, the church, and the academy (Tong, 1989). The aim of radical feminists is to overcome whatever negative effects biology has had on women. It is recognized that women have been oppressed through male control over their bodies through their childbearing capabilities as well as their sexuality (Tong, 1989). As Jaggar and Struhl (1978) suggest, the liberation of women requires the abolition of the social institution of gender, if not the elimination of the biological fact of sex itself.

Socialist feminism has attempted to weave together all of the strands of feminist thought. Socialist feminists place an emphasis on understanding the cultural institutions (i.e. the family, heterosexual intercourse) which play a major role in oppressing women (Jaggar and Struhl, 1978). Tong (1989) stated that socialist feminists stress that women's condition is determined by the structures of production (Marxist), reproduction and sexuality (radical) and the socialization of children (liberal). Tong (1989) emphasized that woman's status in all of these

structures must change if she is to achieve anything approximating full liberation. Socialist feminism moves beyond an attempt to create equality of women within the system, to a struggle for equality within a new system that is not dependant on male domination or any exploitation of one group by another. This approach is concerned as much with women's work in the home as with women's work in the labour force. They maintain that understanding the nature of domestic labour and its role in maintaining the exploitation of the class society as a whole is a crucial task for feminist thinkers (Jaggar and Struhl, 1978). More than any other feminist perspective, socialist feminism is synthetic, "eager to explain each and every aspect of woman's oppression as a part of a large and systematic whole" (Tong, 1989, p. 236).

In the fight against sexism, socialist feminism reinforces the idea that the essential recognition that what is important is not just redistribution of goods, but a change in authority, control, and ideas. A major goal of socialist feminists is to transcend traditional stereotyping and the differences in wealth and power to achieve the full liberation of women (Jaggar and Struhl, 1978).

The ideas of socialist feminism were used to guide the current project, as this perspective offers an

emphasis that is relevant to the current project. The theory recognizes that there are many aspects of women's lives that must be considered in an attempt to understand the oppression experienced. This approach is regarded as appropriate for the current project because as Calasanti and Zajicek (1993) suggested, socialist feminist theory expresses a commitment to a critically oriented understanding of the realities of women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Socialist feminists' attention to the complex character of domination enables us to "revision" concepts so as to make them more inclusive and thus capable of broadening our understanding of older people's lives (Calasanti & Zajicek, 1993). This is particularly important for this project because in cases of elder abuse one must consider the biology of women and men as well as what goes on in the public and private spheres of family life.

Laws (1995) recognized that feminists have called for more attention to what happens in the "private sphere" of the family through which basic patterns of social relations are constituted and reproduced. Cases of child and elder abuse highlight the power relations at work within families and households (Laws, 1995).

Gibson (1996) stated that the current generation of old women have, by and large, spent much of their time in the private spheres of the family and household. It has been recognized that the division of labour between women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere has been oppressive to women and has left much of what happens in the private sphere of the household "hidden" from outsiders. It is evident that this privacy makes older women particularly vulnerable. The private sphere of the household to which many older women have been accustomed allows the development of abusive relationships, free from outside scrutiny.

Gibson (1996) also addressed how the biology of older women contributes to oppression and emphasizes the power of men. She recognized that the perceived loss of sexual attractiveness and actual loss of reproductive functions of women as they age makes them a group that is devalued by society. Women are often seen as productive and valuable members of society based on their physical attractiveness as well as their reproductive capabilities (Tong, 1989). As older women lose these traits, they lose their value to society. This is why Gibson recognized that the problem of aging "is really a problem of and for old women" (p. 436). Rosenthal (1990) provided further support for this idea. She recognized that in a patriarchal society,

power and privilege of women reside in their utility to men. This utility is women's ability and willingness to bear children; therefore, after menopause women are useless (Rosenthal, 1990).

This idea is illustrated by Rosenthal (1990):

We who are old and we who will be old all carry in our heads... a male oriented, youth worshipping fear of aging. These feelings when they remain unexamined cause us to avoid and oppress older women who distort the aging process within ourselves (p. 82).

Another point that must be considered in an examination of older women is that they have experienced lifetimes of oppression. Grau (1989) recognized that the primary cause of economic problems experienced by women are the inequalities in the labour force and the resulting lower wages paid to women. These inequalities also affect women upon retirement when they receive lower social security and pension payments. Gibson (1996) stated that women's poorer health, lower income and less adequate housing do not suddenly appear in old age but are continuous with and contingent upon a lifetime of cumulative disadvantage. Economic status contributes to the vulnerability of older women and provides the opportunity for exploitation and oppression.

Gibson (1996) further recognized that the combination of the tendency of men to marry younger women, the tendency for men to remarry more frequently upon widowhood than women, and the longer life span of women lead to an increased incidence of widowhood among women. Spouses often act as an important source of assistance. When many older women lose this support they are left with limited income and the loss of a major source of assistance. This again leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by others.

Overall it is evident that the themes recognized by socialist feminism lead to a perspective with which to examine the oppression and subordination of older women. Women have often experienced a lifetime of subordination in the private and public spheres as well as a continual devaluation by society based on the biological effects of the aging process. This leads to a vulnerability and oppression that is conducive to the development of abusive relationships.

The concept of ageism which carries many of the themes inherent in feminist theory also provides insight into the plight of older individuals. McDonald et al. (1991) defined ageism as "a pervasive prejudice against elders that involves systematic discrimination and stereotyping against people because they are old" (p. 33). Often old age is viewed as a disability that

is linked to a loss of personal powers and control over one's life. In regards to elder abuse, McDonald et al. (1991) suggested that negative attitudes dehumanize elderly persons and make it easier for them to be victimized. The elderly themselves may view abusive treatment as deserved and unavoidable since they too may internalize society's negative attitudes (McDonald et al., 1991). While all older individuals are subject to ageism, it is important to recognize that older women are oppressed based on gender as well as age.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the current project was to compare elder abuse by a spouse to elder abuse by an adult child. The variables for comparison were gender of the perpetrator and victim, age of the perpetrator and victim, and incidence of each category of abuse.

An elder was defined as an individual 60 years of age and older. An adult child was defined as a biological/adopted child 18 years of age and older. The act of elder abuse was recognized as the substantiation by the Elder Abuse Resource Centre that abuse has occurred. Substantiation is the positive determination at the end of an investigative process that validates alleged claims of abuse and/or neglect associated with a case. All cases in contact with the Elder Abuse Resource Centre have been substantiated either through

police investigation or a vigorous screening process. The definitions of each category of elder abuse were those adapted from the Elder Abuse Resource Centre (1995), and Pittaway et al. (1993).

Physical abuse was defined as the infliction of physical discomfort, pain, or injury, by a person in a relationship of trust. It includes behaviours such as slapping, hitting, punching, beating with hand or instrument, stabbing, shooting, burning, sexual assault, physical coercion and handling roughly (Pittaway et al., 1993; Elder Abuse Resource Centre, 1995).

Psychological abuse was defined as the infliction of mental anguish or the provocation of fear, violence or isolation by a person in a relationship of trust. It diminishes the identity, dignity, and self-worth of the older person. It includes behaviours such as name calling, yelling, insulting, threatening, imitating, swearing, ignoring, isolating, excluding from meaningful events or activities, excluding from decision making when the older adult is capable and wants to be included, and the deprivation of rights (Pittaway et al. 1993: Elder Abuse Resource Centre, 1995).

Material abuse was defined as the theft or misuse of money or property by a person in a relationship of

trust. It includes behaviours such as attempting or actually persuading, tricking, or threatening the older adult out of money, property or possessions; attempting to or actually influencing their will; cashing of pension or other cheques without authorization and use of the older adult's money for purposes other than intended by that older adult (Pittaway et al. 1993; Elder Abuse Resource Centre, 1995).

Neglect was defined as the failure of a caregiver in a relationship of trust to meet the needs of an older adult who is unable to meet those needs him or herself. Neglect includes behaviours such as denial of food, water, and/or medications, medical treatment, therapy, nursing services, therapeutic and equipment aids, clothing, visits from people important to the older person and rights (Pittaway et al. 1993; Elder Abuse Resource Centre, 1995).

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that **there is no relationship between gender and whether the perpetrator is an adult child or a spouse**. A feminist perspective would predict that men are more likely to be the perpetrators of elder abuse. This perspective recognizes that men are able to gain power over women through subordination in the public and private

spheres. In the case of elder abuse, this power is expressed in the form of elder abuse. The literature reviewed was ambiguous; therefore, no clear prediction could be made. Several studies indicated that the perpetrator of abuse is most likely to be a son of the victim (Filinson and Ingman, 1989; Bond, Penner & Yellen, 1995; Godkin, Wolf & Pillemer, 1989; & Korbin et al., 1991). Other studies found that the perpetrator of elder abuse is most likely to be a female (Miller and Dodder, 1989; Pierce and Trotta, 1986). Overall, it is clear that the results are inconclusive.

The second hypothesis tested was that **there is no relationship between gender and being the victim of elder abuse**. A feminist perspective would predict that women are most likely to be victims of elder abuse due to the power that men are able to gain over women and the relative powerlessness of women. Again, the research literature is contradictory and no clear prediction can be made. Kosberg (1988), Mitchell and Smyth (1995), Filinson and Ingman (1989), and Aronson, Thornewell and Williams (1995) found that the victim of elder abuse is most likely to be female. Other research studies indicated that men are at a higher risk of elder abuse than women (Pirnie and Freeze, 1994; Pittaway, Westhues & Peressini, 1995).

The third hypothesis was that **the "old-old" (75+) are more likely to experience elder abuse than younger seniors (60-75)**. Several studies have found that the "old-old" are particularly vulnerable to elder abuse (Champlin, 1982; Filinson and Ingman, 1989; Wolf, 1990; and McDonald et al., 1991). A feminist perspective would agree with this prediction as the themes recognize that individuals can be oppressed based on gender or age. The concept of ageism which borrows many themes from feminist theory recognizes that older individuals are devalued by society; therefore, the older one gets the more one is devalued by society. This devaluation allows another individual the opportunity to gain power over the elder and exercise this power through violence.

The final hypothesis tested was that **there is no relationship between the type of elder abuse, and whether the perpetrator was an adult child or a spouse**.

A feminist perspective would predict that physical abuse is the most commonly reported category of elder abuse. Physical control is the ultimate form of control a man can have over a woman and this physical control is often expressed through violence. The literature reviewed was ambiguous and no clear prediction could be made. Studies by Pittaway and Westhues (1993), Bond et

al. (1995), Neysmith (1995) and Pittaway et al (1995) found contrasting results regarding the incidence of each category of abuse.

Method

Description of Sample

The Elder Abuse Resource Centre in Winnipeg is a part of Age and Opportunity in Manitoba, a service which provides programs and advocacy to seniors (60+) who are involved in abusive relationships. The Centre provides counseling to seniors who seek assistance in dealing with the abuse. A file is kept for every client who receives services from the Centre (starting in 1990 and continuing to the present). These files include demographic information regarding the older individual including age, gender, marital status, living arrangements, impairments (physical or mental), and any other services with which the elder has contact (i.e. home care). The files also contain details about the abusive situation, including specific information about the perpetrator of the abuse and details of the dynamics of the abusive relationship.

The counseling files at the Elder Abuse Resource Centre were used as the source of data for the current project. Fifty cases of abuse by a spouse and 50 cases of abuse by an adult child were randomly selected from open and closed files at the Centre. A table of random

numbers was used to select each case. A case is closed when the client discontinues the use of services at the Centre because the case was resolved or the client was referred to another service. Closed cases were used because there are currently only 30 ongoing cases of elder abuse at the Centre. All cases of abuse by a spouse and by an adult child were separated and given an individual identification number. Often a single case would involve multiple incidents of abuse. Each type of abuse recorded in a case was counted as a separate incident. For example, if a case involved physical and financial abuse, it was counted as one incident of financial abuse and one incident of physical abuse on the data production form.

Access to the records was obtained after the project proposal was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Human Ecology, University of Manitoba.

Research Design

A data production form developed by the investigator was used to record information from the files (see Appendix A). Specifically, demographic information was drawn from the files, including the gender of the perpetrator and victim, the age of the perpetrator and victim, the category(ies) of abuse

experienced, living arrangements and the duration of the abusive relationship. After the relevant data were extracted from the charts, the files were returned and placed in the original order.

All information collected was kept confidential by the investigator, and the names of the clients were not attached to the data production forms. Agency supervision was provided by the counselor at the Elder Abuse Resource Centre. This supervision was provided in terms of locating and accessing files. The work space where information was drawn from the files was located at the Elder Abuse Resource Centre.

Results

The current study used 100 cases of elder abuse for data collection (50 with spouse perpetrators, and 50 with adult child perpetrators). The mean age of the adult child perpetrators was 42.3 years (17 were missing) and the mean age of the spouse perpetrators was 72.0 years (18 were missing). The mean age of all victims was 74.8 years (4 were missing). There were 31 son perpetrators and 19 daughter perpetrators. The spouse sample consisted of 43 male perpetrators and 7 female perpetrators. There were 40 female and 10 male victims of elder abuse by an adult child. The spouse victim sample consisted of 43 females and 7 males.

The current study analyzed 185 incidents of elder

abuse (each type of elder abuse recorded in the file is counted as one incident). Ninety-nine of the incidents were perpetrated by an adult child and 86 incidents were perpetrated by a spouse. Of all incidents analyzed, there were 47 incidents of physical abuse, 75 incidents of psychological abuse, 50 incidents of financial abuse and 13 incidents of neglect. Of incidents involving adult child perpetrators, twenty-three perpetrators lived alone, 12 lived with a spouse, 52 lived with the victim, and 4 had other living arrangements. Of the incidents of spousal perpetration, four perpetrators lived alone, 69 lived with their spouse and six had other living arrangements. In total, fifteen incidents of living arrangements were missing, as the information was not recorded in the files. The duration of the abusive relationship could not be analyzed as observations in 178 of the incidents were missing from the files.

The first hypothesis, that there is no relationship between gender and whether the perpetrator is an adult child or a spouse was first tested using a two-tailed t -test to determine if there was an overall relationship between gender and incidents of elder abuse. Overall, there were 138 incidents of elder abuse that involved a male perpetrator and 47 which involved a female perpetrator ($t = 7.688, p < .05$). Hypothesis

one was not supported as it is clear that in these incidents men are more likely to be perpetrators of elder abuse.

Hypothesis one was further analyzed using the chi-square statistic, to determine whether the gender of the perpetrator is related to whether the perpetrator is an adult child or a spouse. It was found that there is a significant relationship $X^2 (3, N = 185) = 11.12136, p = .00085$. The observed number of incidents with male spouse perpetrators (74) was higher than the expected number (64.2). The observed number of incidents with female adult child perpetrators (35) was also higher than the expected number (25.2).

The second hypothesis, that there is no relationship between gender and the victim of elder abuse, was first tested using a two-tailed t -test for a single proportion to determine if there is a relationship between gender and incidents of abuse. Overall, there were 155 incidents of elder abuse that involved a female victim and 30 incidents that involved a male victim ($t = 12.52, p < .05$). This hypothesis was not supported as the results indicate that females are more likely to be victims of elder abuse.

Hypothesis two was further analyzed using a chi-square test to examine whether gender of the victim was related to whether the perpetrator is an adult child or

a spouse. This test found no significant relationship, $\chi^2 (1, N = 185) = .60561$ $p = .43645$. The observed number of male victims of abuse by an adult child (18) was similar to the expected number (16.1). The observed number of female victims of abuse by an adult child (81) was similar to the expected number (82.9). The observed number of spouse incidents with a male victim (12) was similar to the expected number (13.9). The observed number of female victims of elder abuse by a spouse (74) was similar to the expected number (72.1). The results found were not significant because considering the proportion of females to males in the sample, the observed numbers were very close to the expected numbers for each group.

The third hypothesis, that the "old-old" (75+) are more likely to experience elder abuse than younger seniors (60-75) was not supported. The finding was significant, but opposite to the anticipated direction. Ninety four incidents of abuse of the young-old were found, but only 81 incidents of abuse of the old-old were documented. Hypothesis three was tested with a one-tailed t -test for a single proportion ($t = -1.70$, $p < .05$).

The fourth hypothesis, that there is no relationship between the type of elder abuse and whether the perpetrator was an adult child or a spouse

was tested first with a chi-square test to determine if there was an overall relationship between the category of abuse and whether the perpetrator is an adult child or a spouse. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant overall relationship, $\chi^2 (3, n = 185) = 16.48558$ $p = .00090$. Hypothesis four was further analyzed using a two-tailed t -test for a single proportion to determine specific relationships between each category of abuse and the status of the perpetrator. The analysis indicated that financial abuse was more likely to be committed by an adult child (37 instances) than a spouse (13 instances), $t = 4.00$, $p < .05$. There was no relationship between other types of abuse and whether the perpetrator was an adult child or a spouse.

Discussion

Results of the data analysis for the current study indicate that there are some unique relationships associated with this sample of older adults. The following discussion of the results will explain these findings using the ideas and themes consistent with a feminist perspective that looks at gender and power relations.

The results of the first hypothesis indicate men are more likely to be the perpetrators of elder abuse. This finding is supported by several other studies

cited (Anetzberger, 1989; Bond, Penner & Yellen, 1995; Sharon, 1991; and Korbin, Anetzberger & Eckert, 1991). The results of the second hypothesis indicate that women are more likely to be the victims of elder abuse. This finding also supports the work of several researchers (Aronson, Thornewell & Williams, 1995; Mitchell & Smyth, 1994; and Sharon, 1991). The results of both hypotheses can be explained similarly using a feminist perspective. As previously discussed, feminism regards violence in intimate relationships as a reflection of the unequal and oppressive power relations between women and men (Walker, 1990). Power is one of the main concepts of this approach. The themes of socialist feminism regard the differences between women and men as determined by the structures of production, reproduction and sexuality, and the socialization of children (Tong, 1989).

Traditionally, from a young age men have been socialized to be the dominant, powerful individuals in relationships. Boys are taught not to show emotion and to be strong. This socialization carries into their adult years where they are expected to be the breadwinners and providers for partners and families. This gives them power in the family and society, allowing them to have control over the weaker, more dependent individuals. The spouse group in the current

sample was between the ages of 60 and 83. Individuals in this cohort were likely socialized according to the traditional ideas about women and men. Men in spousal relationships were likely the primary "breadwinners" and gained power in the relationship from this role.

For reasons similar to the spouses, the sons in the sample likely had control in the relationships with their parents. Although equality between the genders is developing in society there is still an unequal balance which favours men. Also, the victims in the relationship were from the older cohort who have been socialized with traditional values. The female victims of elder abuse in the sample were all sixty years of age or older. This segment of the population includes many women who did not work, or who worked very little throughout their younger years. This situation made older women less powerful in intimate relationships, as many were, and are, dependent on others for material and financial resources (Walker, 1990). The older individuals may believe that, based upon traditional values, the son deserves to have power.

The concept of ageism is also a factor in this relationship. In addition to traditional gender values, the sons have power based on their youth. Ageism sees older individuals as useless, dependent, and weak (McDonald et al., 1993). These attitudes are fostered

by a society that values youth and views older individuals as powerless. Based on these ideas, the older population is vulnerable and subject to victimization.

The double standard applied to biology is an additional factor in abuse, particularly in the spousal relationships. As discussed, women are regarded as unattractive and useless as they age, due to their loss of reproductive functions and bodily changes that accompany aging. Conversely, men are seen as "distinguished" as they age. A practical example of this is the popularity of older actors in movies who have greying hair and wrinkles, but are still regarded as sexy. One would be hard pressed to find more than a few female actresses who are viewed this way. It has also been discussed that as women age they lose reproductive functions and therefore are regarded as useless by society (Gibson, 1996). They begin to experience many biological changes of aging and are regarded as unattractive in a beauty and youth worshipping society. These factors contribute to the negative stereotype of older women and oppresses them to the point that less oppressed individuals are able to gain power over them. Clearly, this is another example of how men continue to retain power over women. Both are subject to the infirmities of aging, but women

are faced with the most negative outcomes. This, again makes them vulnerable and "weaker" compared to males.

All of the factors discussed contributed to the findings of the current project: that men were more likely to be the perpetrators of elder abuse and that women were more likely to be the victims of elder abuse. Men continued to retain the "upper-hand" throughout their lives and were able to gain power and maintain control in relationships.

The results of the first hypothesis also found that there were some unique characteristics involved in elder abusive relationships. The fact that the number of male spouse perpetrator incidents was higher than expected clearly adheres to the principles of feminist thought. It seems that husbands in the sample exercised the traditional male role, as the person with power and control in the relationship. Clearly, in the current project there was an unequal power relationship between the husband and the wife, with the outcome of the inequality expressed in the form of abuse.

These results are also in agreement with Gibson's (1990) idea that the current generation of older women has spent much of their time in the private spheres of the family and the household. This could be an illustration of Gibson's idea that much of what goes on in the private sphere of the household is "hidden" from

outsiders. This privacy allows husbands to abuse their wives who spend much of their time within the home, hidden from outside scrutiny.

In contrast to this finding, the current project found that the number of daughter-perpetrated incidents was higher than expected. Female abusers are a unique group in abusive relationships. The literature on domestic violence has traditionally focused on a male abuser and a female victim. This is logical since, at younger ages, the number of female abusers is significantly lower than male abusers (Walker, 1990). In terms of elder abuse, this dynamic is quite different. This finding can be explored using ideas borrowed from both feminism and ageism. It is clear that ageism is at work in this relationship. As previously discussed, the concept of ageism equates being old with a loss of personal power and control. Sometimes these negative attitudes lead to the opportunity for a younger individual to gain control over an older person, with an outcome of victimization of the older individual. The daughters analyzed in the current study may have internalized society's negative attitudes about the aged and exploited their older parent's disadvantaged position. It is evident that the older parents have also internalized society's negative attitudes and have found themselves in a

powerless relationship.

Another contributing factor is the fact that women are often the caregivers for older relatives who require assistance (McDonald et al., 1993). This causes women to spend more time with the older person than other individuals; therefore, the primary caregiver has more opportunity to exploit the individual. Also, as many older individuals experience the loss of a spouse, they may live alone. This privacy allows for exploitation to occur free from outside scrutiny.

This dynamic could be further explained by the loss of power women experience throughout their lives. Young women, according to feminist theory, spend much of their lives in a disadvantaged and oppressed position as compared to men (Walker, 1990). They spend much of their lives being controlled by the patriarchal attitudes of society. During their older years they may find themselves in a position of control as their parents age and begin to experience some of the infirmities of aging (McDonald et al., 1993). At this point these women often find themselves in a powerful position. This allows them to be in a position to take advantage of another individual, they are now powerful, no longer powerless in the relationship. Unfortunately, many adult daughters take advantage of the power they finally have over someone, and exploit it in terms of

abuse.

A further explanation of this finding is that since women are most often the primary caregivers for older parents they perform a role which requires a great deal of time and energy (Connidis, 1989). There are few societal supports provided to women in this position, as it is a societal expectation that children will return care to parents, that was provided to them when they were younger (Connidis, 1989). There is also little value placed on this role by society. Therefore, women may abuse not to exploit or take advantage of another individual, but may do it out of frustration with the little support and assistance they receive.

There are many possible explanations for why women abuse older relatives. Although some of the explanations provided for this dynamic may seem contradictory, it is important to note that each situation of abuse is unique. Therefore, women may abuse parents for different reasons, and programs targeted toward female abusers must provide appropriate services for the individual situations.

There are many implications that stem from these findings. First, it is evident that the traditional roles of women and men still have a significant effect on gender relations despite the attempts of feminists in recent decades to abolish these stereotypes. This is

evidence that the systemic power and control of men still affects spousal relationships. Therefore, a primary concern on the feminist agenda must be to continue to lobby for and empower women to transcend traditional stereotypes. Overall, this is evidence that many traditional ideas about men and women are still at work in intimate relationships.

It is also clear that the oppression of negative stereotypes about older people is a concern in our society and must be addressed. Individuals must be educated about the complexities of the lives of older people so that they may also be empowered and not fall victim to ageist attitudes and subordination.

Further, these results indicate that in situations of elder abuse, programs and policies must target male and female abusers. It must be recognized that elder abuse is different from abuse that occurs in younger families and many elder abuse perpetrators are in fact female. This also highlights the importance of implementing appropriate services for female caregivers of older relatives, such as caregiver support groups and respite programs, specifically targeted toward this group.

Another issue highlighted by this project is that there are clearly very different types of abuse dynamics co-existing under the umbrella term elder

abuse. Daughters abusing mothers may be doing so for very different reasons than husbands abusing wives, and sons abusing parents. This idea suggests that the term elder abuse needs to be subdivided into more meaningful categories, so that policies and programs account for the different situations. One cannot attempt to legislate, educate, and intervene in different situations using the same theories and principles.

The third hypothesis, that the old-old are more likely to be victims of abuse than the young-old, produced unanticipated results. In fact, the relationship was found to be the reverse of what was expected. The analysis indicated that among those seniors using the Elder Abuse Resource Centre, the young-old are more likely to be victims of elder abuse in this sample.

Evidently there was something special about this group to lead to a result which contradicts much of the elder abuse literature. It is important to recognize that the results one finds depend on the context in which one works. Research in a community agency is very different from that in a medical situation. Much of the research cited regarding the age of elder abuse victims was conducted by individuals in medical settings (Champlin, 1982; Wolf 1988; and Wolf; 1990). One must keep in mind that research suggests that old-old

seniors are less mobile and therefore more isolated than younger seniors who are able to get out and have contact with more people (Wolf, 1990). Those in the medical professions have contact with the old-old seniors out of necessity. Older individuals must receive medical attention, particularly at later ages as they experience increasing health problems. Clearly, when the older individual has contact with these medical professionals elder abuse can be detected. In a community agency, the individuals have a choice as to whether or not to seek help; it is not a necessity (Wolf, 1988).

Accessibility is another issue to consider. The Elder Abuse Resource Centre is the agency from which data were collected for the current project. The centre is located on a busy street in a downtown area. Of course, for old-old individuals who are less mobile than younger seniors, it is difficult for them to gain access to the services. Mobility and transportation are necessary to access the services at the Elder Abuse Resource Centre. The old-old senior may also have less access to resources for transportation such as a driver's license, a vehicle, or someone to drive them. There are some home visits conducted, but the senior must contact the centre for assistance, which highlights the issue of awareness.

Individuals must be aware of a service before they can gain access to it. The old-old, many of whom are somewhat isolated and have fewer social contacts than the young-old (since spouses and peers may have died), may have less opportunity to learn about the resources available to them. According to McDonald et al. (1993) friends and spouses are an important resource for assistance. One cannot ask for assistance from somewhere that they do not know exists. The implication of this is that if the old-old do not gain access to the resource it will not be recorded in the agency case files.

Since the old-old may have a smaller social network and less access to resources than the young-old, they may be more reluctant to uncover the abusive relationship because they have a lot more to lose than younger seniors. Admitting that someone is abusing them may sever ties which are very important to the older person. The abuse may be worth enduring to maintain the ties. Often the older person is ashamed to disclose the fact that a family member is abusing them. Older adults may see the abuse as a "family problem" (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992). In a medical setting the abuse is easier to detect and the senior is confronted and offered assistance (Hamilton, 1989); in a community agency the reverse is the usual situation.

All of the factors mentioned may have contributed to this unusual finding. It also highlights the importance of government funding for community organizations so that programs can reach isolated seniors. Community agencies need more resources to promote accessible services. This will help them provide assistance to older seniors to help them stop the cycle of violence.

The findings related to the fourth hypothesis, that there is no relationship between the type of abuse and status of the perpetrator, are worthy of discussion. They provide strong evidence that elder abuse by an adult child and elder abuse by a spouse are different. Adult children are more likely than a spouse to steal or misuse their parents money or possessions. This finding is supported by Nahmiash (1995), who also found that material abuse was the most commonly reported category of abuse.

The fact that adult children are more likely than spouses to commit financial abuse, which focuses on the resources of the older adult, provides some intriguing ideas about the older parent - adult child relationship. According to Connidis (1989) there is a high degree of interdependence in most older married couples. This is because often there is a decreased pool of social contacts, therefore spouses often come

to rely on each other to "fill the gap" (Connidis, 1989, p. 22). Further, Connidis states that "...most married persons aged 50 and over maintain considerable reciprocity in support exchanges with their spouses" (p. 22). This support certainly includes an exchange of financial resources. According to Connidis (1989) the relationship between an adult child and a spouse involves different dynamics. This relationship also involves reciprocity, but focuses more on practical help. Further, Connidis describes this dynamic between many older parents and adult children as a sense of filial responsibility rather than closeness. Based on these ideas, it appears that often the generational relationship is less intimate than that between spouses. This leads to a possible explanation for the findings of hypothesis four. An adult child may be less aware of the personal vulnerabilities of parents, therefore he/she is more likely to take advantage of physical resources, and exploit the parent financially, rather than psychologically or physically. Also, the ideas of ageism are again at work as a younger individual is able to gain the control to exploit the older individual with little respect for that person.

This result could be further supported by recent research that suggests that often the abuser of an older individual has an addiction to alcohol, drugs or

gambling (Greenberg, McKibben & Raymond, 1990). These addictions often strain the resources of the addicted individual, forcing that person to go to other resources for money, leading to the exploitation of the financial resources of another individual. As previously discussed older adults are often easy "prey" based on the negative attitudes about aging.

It is important to note at this point that all of the incidents analyzed for the current project were taken from reported cases of elder abuse. Most often the abuse was reported by someone other than the abused older person. In the case of financial abuse, often the person who reports it is a bank worker or another relative (McDonald et al., 1993). The dynamics of the cross-generation relationship are important to consider. Financial abuse is when an individual steals or misuses the money or possessions of another individual because the abuser is not entitled to those resources. A bank worker is more likely to suspect financial abuse when an adult child is taking the money because often that person is not entitled to those assets. If it is the spouse of the older person who is withdrawing money or assets on behalf of their spouse, often it would be less likely to be regarded as stealing. It is often assumed that spouses share resources; therefore, it may be less noticeable if a

spouse is using or taking assets that belong to a husband or wife.

This is a unique finding as no other published study has been located which has highlighted the differences between the abuse perpetrated by each group (spouse and adult child). This finding is particularly important for professionals working with abused older adults. Clearly, services must be differentially focused for each group. Different types of abuse require unique methods of assistance, and professionals must be aware of this.

Overall, the findings of the current study are noteworthy. This study compared two groups of abused older individuals and found that abuse by a spouse is indeed different in some aspects from abuse by an adult child. This is very important for those individuals working in settings in contact with abused older individuals, as one must be sensitive to the needs of the particular situation.

This project has also provided guidance for future research. Clearly, a larger random sample of the overall older population is needed to confirm the results outside an agency setting. The comparison model of the current project also provided the groundwork for expanding to include comparison of other perpetrator groups, for example, friends, other relatives, service

personnel. It is important to analyze each group individually and then compare them to reveal similarities and differences so that the best assistance can be provided for each situation. A comparison among ethnic groups is also a direction for further research. Different cultures have different values and may require unique forms of assistance and programs (Pittaway et al., 1993). This type of research could also be strengthened with the use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Personal interviews with abused seniors would support the findings in a more personal, individual sense. Overall, the current project has highlighted the importance of this type of research model and has provided direction for expansion.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed highlighted some of the controversy and gaps in the elder abuse literature. Previous research indicates that there is little consensus regarding gender and age relationships in elder abusive relationships. There have also been many different findings regarding the incidence of elder abuse. The current study attempted to shed light on some of the differences and gaps in the literature. A comparative analysis of elder abuse by an adult child and elder abuse by a spouse was an attempt to address

these issues. The findings indicated that there are differences in these abusive relationships and that the ideas of ageism and feminism serve well to explain some of the findings. There are many implications of this project, but most importantly, it is evident that systemic differences in the status and power of women and men, and ageist attitudes toward the elderly, can lead to hostile, abusive treatment of older individuals. Advocacy programs and government agendas must focus on these issues as they will certainly become a forefront concern as the elderly population continues to increase.

Summary

The literature reviewed for this project found that there have been many different findings in projects examining elder abuse. The specific variables of interest for the current project were gender, age and incidence. The studies cited in the literature review found differing results related to whether males or females are more likely to be the perpetrators of elder abuse; whether males or females are more likely to be the victims of elder abuse; whether the "old-old" or the "young-old" are more likely to be victims of elder abuse; and whether the incidence of financial abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse or neglect is more frequent in the elderly population. It is these

controversies that provided guidance for the current project. Also, no published study was found that examined these variables separately for older individuals abused by a spouse or by an adult child. Therefore, the current study was organized as a comparison of a group of seniors abused by a spouse and a group of seniors abused by an adult child using the aforementioned variables. The purpose was to discover similarities and differences between the two groups.

Data for the project were collected using counseling files from the Elder Abuse Resource Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Cases of abuse by an adult child and cases of abuse by a spouse were given individual identification numbers. Fifty files were selected from each groups to be analyzed. A data production form developed by the researcher was used to collect the information from the files.

The data were analyzed and statistical tests were performed for each hypothesis. The analysis indicated that men are more likely to be the perpetrators of elder abuse, women are more likely to be victims of elder abuse, the "young-old" are more likely to be the victims of elder abuse, and elder abuse by an adult child is more likely to be financial abuse. A feminist perspective was used to interpret the results. It was suggested that traditional gender socialization as well

as the relative power and control of men and women services as an explanation for the findings that men are more likely to be perpetrators of elder abuse and women are more likely to be victims. The finding that the "young-old" were more likely to be the victims of elder abuse in the current sample highlighted awareness and accessibility issues with the Elder Abuse Resource Centre. The finding that adult children are more likely than a spouse to perpetrate financial abuse was described as a function of the generational relationship as well as the fact that most abusers of seniors have other dependencies as well which strain their financial resources.

There were many implications of the findings discussed. First, it was suggested that services for abused seniors target abuse by an adult child and abuse by a spouse differently since the results of the study indicate that there are different dynamics involved. Another idea was that feminist groups continue to educate and lobby for the equality as it appears that the power and control issues between men and women are worthy of attention. It was recognized that funding for programs which target seniors should be forefront on government agendas since seniors must be provided with accessible, affordable services to combat the growing problem of elder abuse.

Directions for further research were discussed and recommendations were made. The current project should be replicated using a larger random sample of the general older population. Ethnic and cultural differences should also be recognized. A further suggestion is that a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods be used in future projects to strengthen the findings.

Overall, this study produced some unique and important findings. It illustrates the need to recognize that situations of elder abuse are unique and should be targeted accordingly. It also highlighted the continuing power and control struggles between men and women, an issue that continues to be a major societal concern. With the population of older people growing rapidly and expected to continue to do so for several years the importance of services and education about the elderly must be addressed.

References

- Anetzberger, G. J. (1989). Implications of research on elder abuse perpetrators: Rethinking current social policy and programming. In R. Filinson, & S. Ingman (Eds.), Elder Abuse: Practice and Policy (pp. 43-51). New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Aronson, J., Thornewell, C., & Williams, K. (1995). Wife assault in old age: Coming out of obscurity. Canadian Journal on Aging, 14, 72-88.
- Bond, J. B., Penner, R. L., & Yellen, P. (1995). Perceived effectiveness of legislation concerning abuse of the elderly: A survey of professionals in Canada and the United States. Canadian Journal on Aging, 14, 118-135.
- Calasanti, T. M., & Zajicek, A. M. (1993). A socialist-feminist approach to aging: Embracing diversity. Journal of Aging Studies, 7(2), 117-131.
- Champlin, L. (1982). The battered elderly. Geriatrics, 37, 119-121.
- Engels, F. (1978). The origin of the family, private property, and the state. In A. M. Jaggar & P. Rothenberg Struhl (Eds.), Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men (pp. 97-107). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Filinson, A., & Ingman, T. (1989). Elder abuse:

Practice and policy. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Firestone, S. (1978). The dialectic of sex. In A. M. Jaggar & P. Rothenberg Struhl (Eds.), Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men (pp. 118-123). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Fulmer, T. (1989). Mistreatment of elders: Assessment, diagnosis and intervention. Nursing Clinics of North America, 24, 707-716.

Gibson, D. (1996). Broken down by age and gender: "The problem of old women" redefined. Gender and Society, 10(4), 433-448.

Godkin, M., Wolf, R., & Pillemer, K. (1989). A case-comparison analysis of elder abuse and neglect. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 28, 207-225.

Grau, L. (1989). Women in the later years: Health, social and cultural perspectives. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Greenberg, J. R., McKibben, M., & Raymond, J. A. (1990). Dependent adult children and elder abuse. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 2, 73-85.

Health and Welfare Canada. (1992). Community awareness and response: Abuse and neglect of older adults. Ottawa: Mental Health Division.

Hudson, M. (1989). Analyses of the concepts of elder

mistreatment: Abuse and neglect. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 1, 5-25.

Hyde-Robertson, B., Pirnie, S., & Freeze, C. (1994, November). A strategy against elderly mistreatment. Caring Magazine, 40-44.

Jaggar, A. M. & Rothenberg, Struhl, P. (1978). Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Korbin, J., Anetzberger, G., & Eckert, J. (1990). Elder abuse and child abuse: A consideration of similarities and differences in intergenerational family violence. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 1, 1-14.

Kosberg, J. (1988). Preventing elder abuse: Identification of high risk factors prior to placement decisions. The Gerontologist, 28, 43-50.

Laws, G. (1995). Understanding ageism: Lessons from feminism and postmodernism. The Gerontologist, 35, 112-118.

McDonald, P. L., Hornick, J. P., Robertson, G. B., & Wallace, J. E. (1991). Elder Abuse and neglect in Canada. Toronto: Butterworths.

MacKinnon, C. (1989). Toward a feminist theory of the state. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

MacLean, M. J. (Ed.). (1995). Abuse and neglect of older Canadians: Strategies for change. Ottawa: Canadian Association on Gerontology, Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.

McKenzie, P., Tod, L., & Yellen, P. (1995). Community-based intervention strategies for cases of abuse and neglect of seniors: A comparison of models, philosophies and practice issues. In M. Maclean (Ed.), Abuse and neglect of older Canadians: Strategies for change (pp. 17-26). Ottawa: Canadian Association on Gerontology, Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.

Miller, R. B., & Dodder, R. A. (1989). The abused: abuser dyad: Elder abuse in the state of Florida. In R. Filinson, & S. Ingman (Eds.), Elder abuse: Practice and policy (pp. 166-179). New York: Human Sciences Press.

Mill, J. S. (1978). The subjection of women. In A. Jaggar & P. Struhl (Eds.), Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men. New York: McGraw Hill.

Mitchell, C., & Smyth, C. (1994). A case study of an abused older woman. Health Care for Women International, 125, 521-535.

Nahmiash, D. (1995). Introduction: Practice Issues in the abuse and neglect of older Canadians. In M. Maclean (Ed.), Abuse and neglect of older Canadians:

Strategies for change (pp. 3-4). Ottawa: Canadian Association on Gerontology, Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing Inc.

Neysmith, S. M. (1995). Feminist methodologies: A consideration of principles and practice for research in gerontology. Canadian Journal on Aging, 14, 100-118.

Osmond, M., & Thorne, B. (1993). In P. Boss, W. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. Schumm, & S. Steinmetz. (Eds). (1993). Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods. New York: Plenum Press.

Pierce, R., & Trotta, R. (1986). Abused parents: A hidden family problem. Journal of Family Violence, 1, 99-110.

Pillemer, K. (1985). The dangers of dependency: New findings on domestic violence against the elderly. Social Problems, 33, 146-158.

Pittaway, E., & Westhues, A. (1993). The prevalence of elder abuse and neglect of older adults who access health and social services in London, Ontario, Canada. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 5, 77-93.

Pittaway, E., Westhues, A., & Peressini, T. (1995). Risk factors for abuse and neglect among older adults. Canadian Journal on Aging, 14, 20-44.

Pittaway, E., Gallagher, E., Stones, M., Kosberg, J., Nahmiash, D., Podniecks, E., Strain, L., & Bond, J.

(1993). Services for abused older Canadians. Victoria, B. C.: The Interministry Committee on Elder Abuse.

Reed, E. (1978). Women: Caste class or oppressed sex? In A. M. Jaggar & P. Rothenberg-Struhl (Eds.), Feminist frameworks: Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men (pp. 107-118). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Rosenthal, E. R. (Ed.). (1990). Women, aging and ageism. New York: Harrington Park Press.

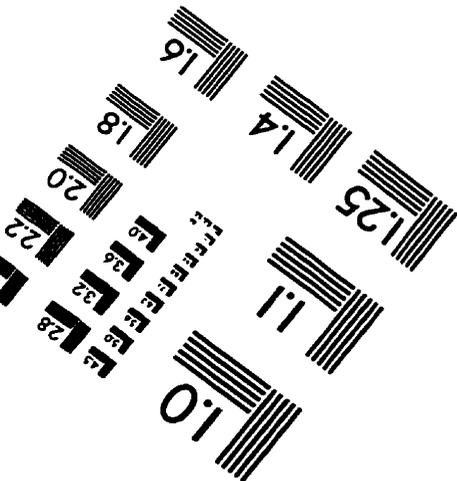
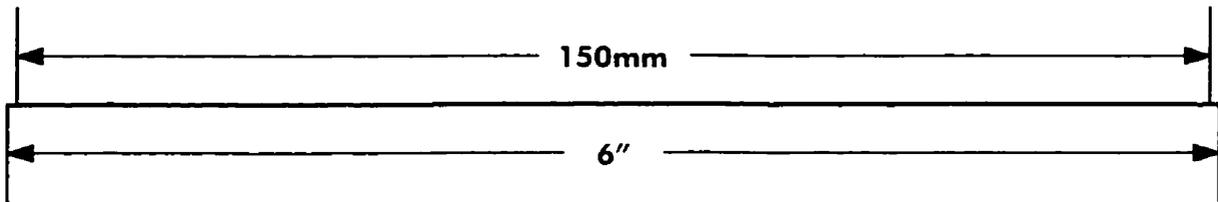
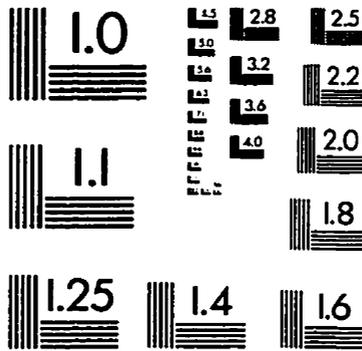
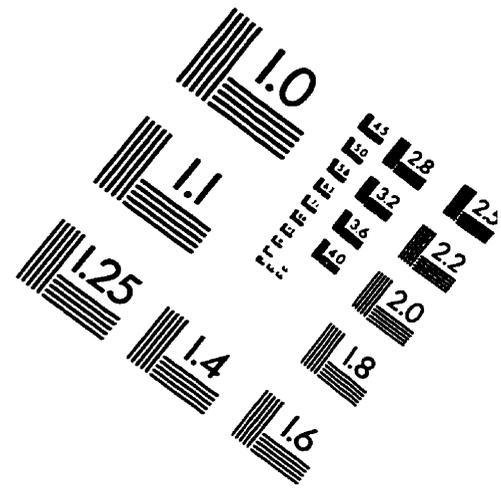
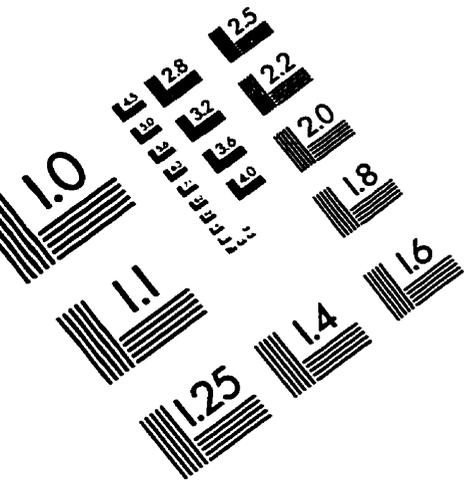
Sharon, N. (1992). Elder abuse and neglect - substantiations: What they tell us about the problem. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 3, 19-35.

Tong, R. (1989). Feminist thought: A comprehensive introduction. San Francisco: Westview Press.

Wolf, R. (1988). Elder abuse: Ten years later. Journal of the American Gerontological Society, 36, 758-762.

Wolf, R. (1990). Testimony on behalf of the national committee for the prevention of elder abuse before the U.S. house select committee on aging, subcommittee on human services. Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 2, 137-149.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved

