

Elder Abuse and its relationship to social ageism

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Extreme Social Problems

- Abnormal behaviour
- A dysfunction within a social system
- An indication of underlying social mechanisms

The strange case of elder abuse and public perception

Research Findings

UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People



Elder abuse and neglect (mistreatment) are increasingly acknowledged as a social problem in the UK and internationally, but there has been an absence of any sound data on the extent of this in the UK. This lack of evidence prompted Comic Relief and the Department of Health to fund a dedicated survey to provide nationally representative prevalence estimates of elder abuse and neglect in the community, the results of which are presented here.

- Overall, 2.6% of people aged 66 and over living in private households (including sheltered housing) reported that they had experienced mistreatment involving a family member, friend, or care worker during the past year.
- This equates to about 227,000 people aged 66 and over experiencing mistreatment, or around one in forty of the older population.
- When the one year prevalence of mistreatment is broadened to include incidents involving neighbours and acquaintances, the overall prevalence increases from 2.6% to 4.0%. This would give a figure of approximately 342,400 older people subject to some form of mistreatment.

Considering mistreatment in the past year involving family, close friends and care workers:

- The predominant type of mistreatment reported was neglect (1.1%), followed by financial abuse (0.7%). The prevalence of psychological and physical abuse was similar (both 0.4%), and sexual abuse (reported cases were of harassment) was the least reported type (0.2%).
- Women were more likely to say that they had experienced mistreatment than men: 3.8% of women and 1.1% of men.
- Mistreatment in the past year varied significantly by marital status, and increased with declining health status, depression and loneliness.
- 51% of mistreatment in the past year involved a spouse/partner, 49% another family member, 13% a care worker and 5% a close friend. (Respondents could mention more than one person.)



Trajectories for prevalence

- 1986 Boston 2.6/3.2%
- 1990 Canada 4.0%
- 1992 UK 5.0%
- 1994 Holland 5.6%
- 1999 Canada 7.0%
- 2002 H.K. 20%
- 2005 Israel 18.4%
- 2005 Germany 6.5%
- 2006 UK 2.6/4.0%
- 2006 Spain 0.8/ 4.5%

Eurobarometer 2008

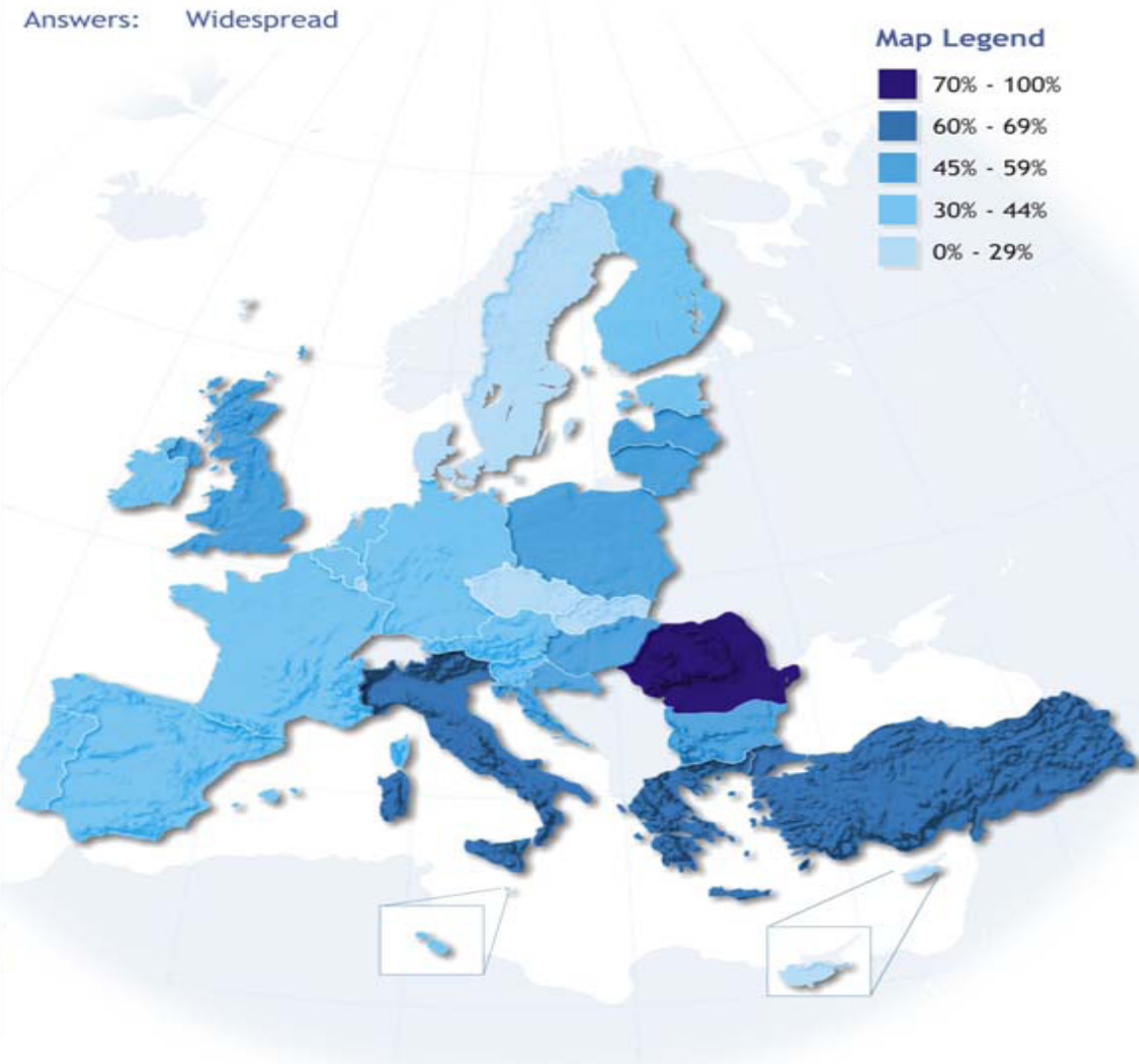
- 47% of European Citizens: 'believe that poor treatment neglect and even abuse of dependent older people is widespread'
- Varies from 86% in Romania, to 17% in Cyprus
- Sexual Assault 31%, Physical 52%, Psychological 64%, Property 67% as the:
'Level of risk you think dependent older people are exposed to'

Country Results		
 Romania	86%	
 Greece	64%	
 Italy	63%	
 Lithuania	58%	
 Bulgaria	53%	
 Hungary	51%	
 Latvia	50%	
 Poland	48%	
 European Union (27)	47%	
 United Kingdom	47%	
 France	43%	
 Portugal	43%	
 Germany	42%	
 Spain	39%	
 Estonia	39%	
 Belgium	36%	
 Slovenia	35%	
 The Netherlands	34%	
 Austria	34%	
 Malta	34%	
 Finland	33%	
 Ireland	32%	
 Czech Republic	27%	
 Denmark	23%	
 Luxembourg	22%	
 Slovakia	20%	
 Sweden	19%	
 Cyprus	17%	

Other Countries		
 Turkey	66%	
 Croatia	47%	

Question: QA30. Could you please tell me whether, in your opinion, poor treatment, neglect and even abuse of dependent elderly people is very widespread, fairly widespread, fairly rare or very rare in (OUR COUNTRY)?

Answers: Widespread



BBC study (Hussein et al, 2007)

- 55% 'a great deal' of mistreatment
- respondents estimated that 11.4% older adults suffered from physical abuse, 4.9% from stealing (financial), 0.8% from sexual abuse and 20.7% from humiliation (psychological).

Under reporting

- USA: National Elder Abuse Incidence Study 1 in 4 cases go unreported
- UK: NATCEN/King's Prevalence Figures, compared to APS caseloads- appx 3% being picked up.

Ageism

Ageism as Civil Rights

- “Ageism can be seen as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender ... Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves, thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings” (Butler 1975)

Institutional Ageism

- “Ageism is a set of beliefs originating in the biological variation between people and relating to the ageing process. It is in the actions of corporate bodies, what is said and done by their representatives, and the resulting views that are held by ordinary ageing people, that ageism is made manifest”.
- (Bytheway 1995:14.)

Ageism as 'Othering'

- Every individual has the potential to experience discrimination or prejudice based on their age if they live long enough. It produces an 'othering' effect that lumps all those considered old into a category defined,
 - first, as different and, secondly as inferior.
 - More importantly, it suggests that all old people are alike, hence obscuring differences that exist among and between older persons.
- (Phillips *et al.*, 2010: 21)

Abuse

Setting a boundary: it's
relationships

Types of Definition

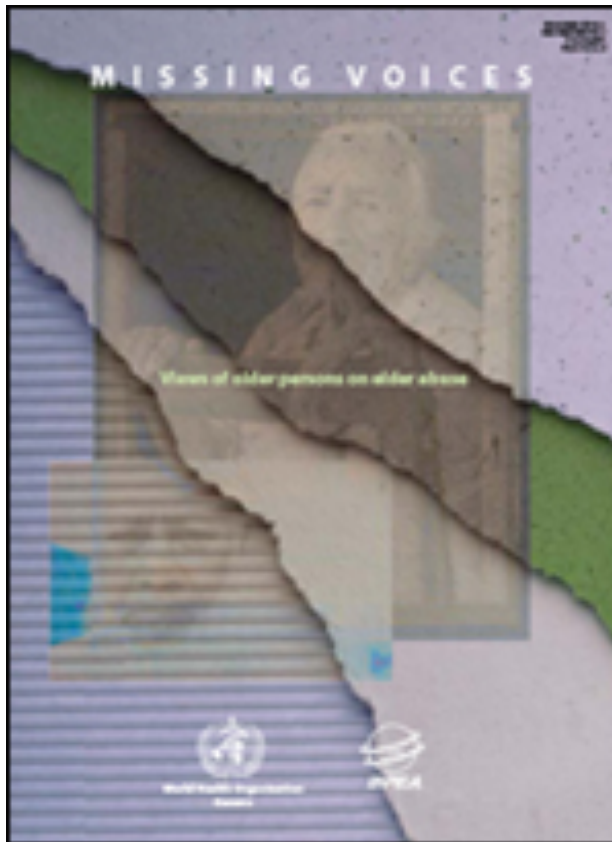
- Holistic definitions
- Typologies

- Avoid definitional inflation
- Make it distinctive
- Make it manageable and testable

Operational Typologies

- **Financial abuse**
1 or more instance of financial abuse in the past year by family member, close friend, care worker
- **Psychological abuse**
10 or more instances of psychological abuse in the past year by the same person (family member, close friend, care worker)
- **Physical abuse**
1 or more instance of physical abuse in the past year by family member, close friend, care worker
- **Sexual harassment / abuse**
1 or more instance of sexual harassment / abuse in the past year by family member, close friend, care worker
- **Neglect**
10 or more instances of neglect in the past year by family member, close friend, care worker

An Holistic Definition



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

US National Research Council 2003

- Intentional actions that cause harm or create a serious risk of harm (whether or not harm is intended) to a vulnerable elder by a caregiver or other person who stands in a trust relationship to the elder
- failure by a caregiver to satisfy the elder's basic needs or to protect the elder from harm.

US National Research Council 2003

- ‘Mistreatment’ : that some injury, deprivation, or dangerous condition has occurred to the elder person and that someone else bears responsibility for causing the condition or failing to prevent it’.

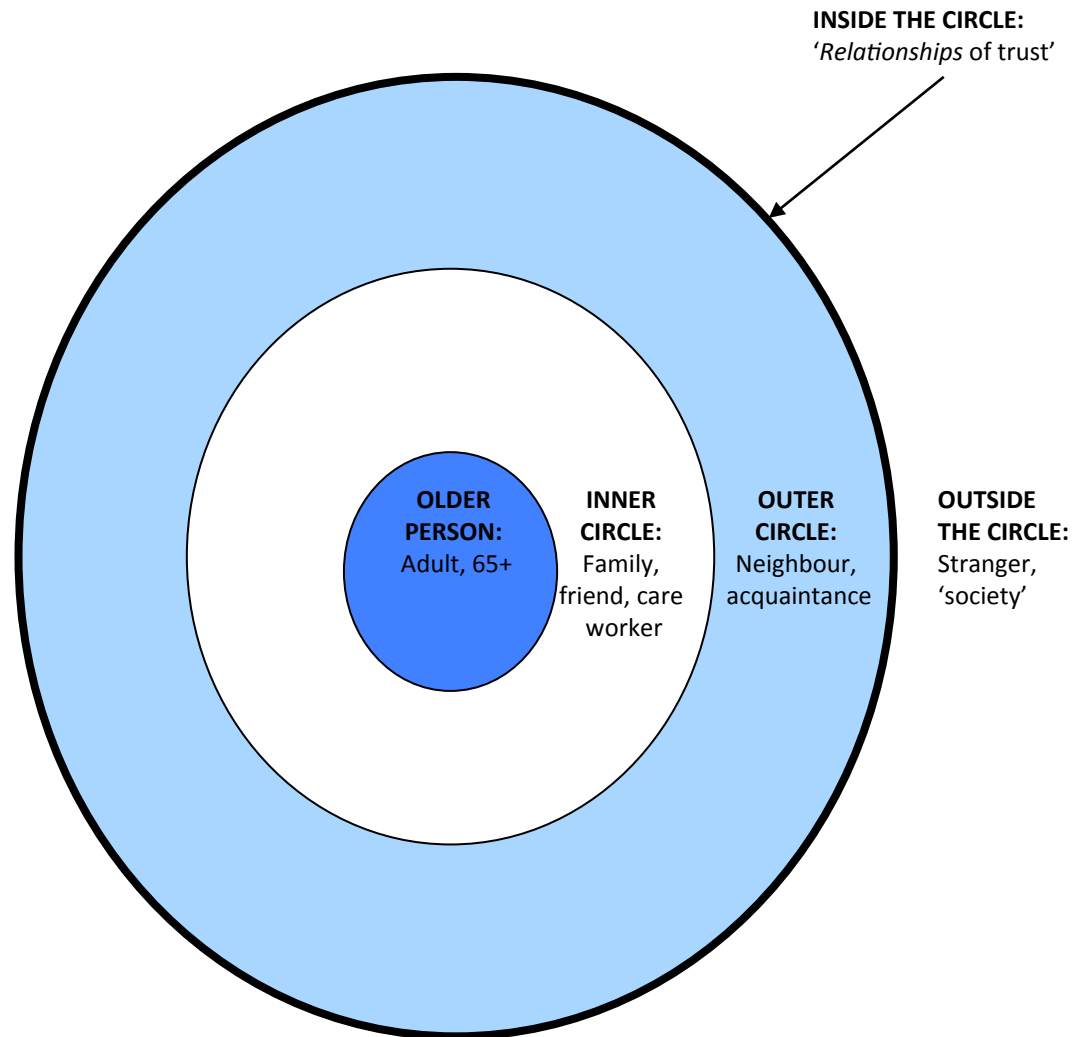
Excludes

- Self-neglect
- Self-harm
- Crimes by strangers
- Social Ageism

Includes

- Interpersonal Relationships
- Care settings
- Formal: professional helpers
- Informal : families, friends

Figure 2: Inner and outer circles of trust as applied to perpetrators of mistreatment.



An interpersonal problem: clarity
of boundary

But...

Liquid Love

‘Relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence’

‘Opposition, born of the horror of ambiguity, becomes the main source of ambivalence’

(Bauman, 2003).

Structural Ambivalence

‘Structurally created contradictions that are made manifest in interaction’ and
‘simultaneously held opposing feelings or emotions that are due in part to countervailing expectations about how individuals should act’
(Connidis and McMullin, 2002).

Emotional Ambivalence

‘the simultaneous existence of positive and negative sentiments in the older parent–adult child relationship’ (Pillemer *et al.*, 2007: 775).

- multiple relationships within families,
- dependency and interdependency,
- changed status.

Sources of ambiguity in situations of abuse

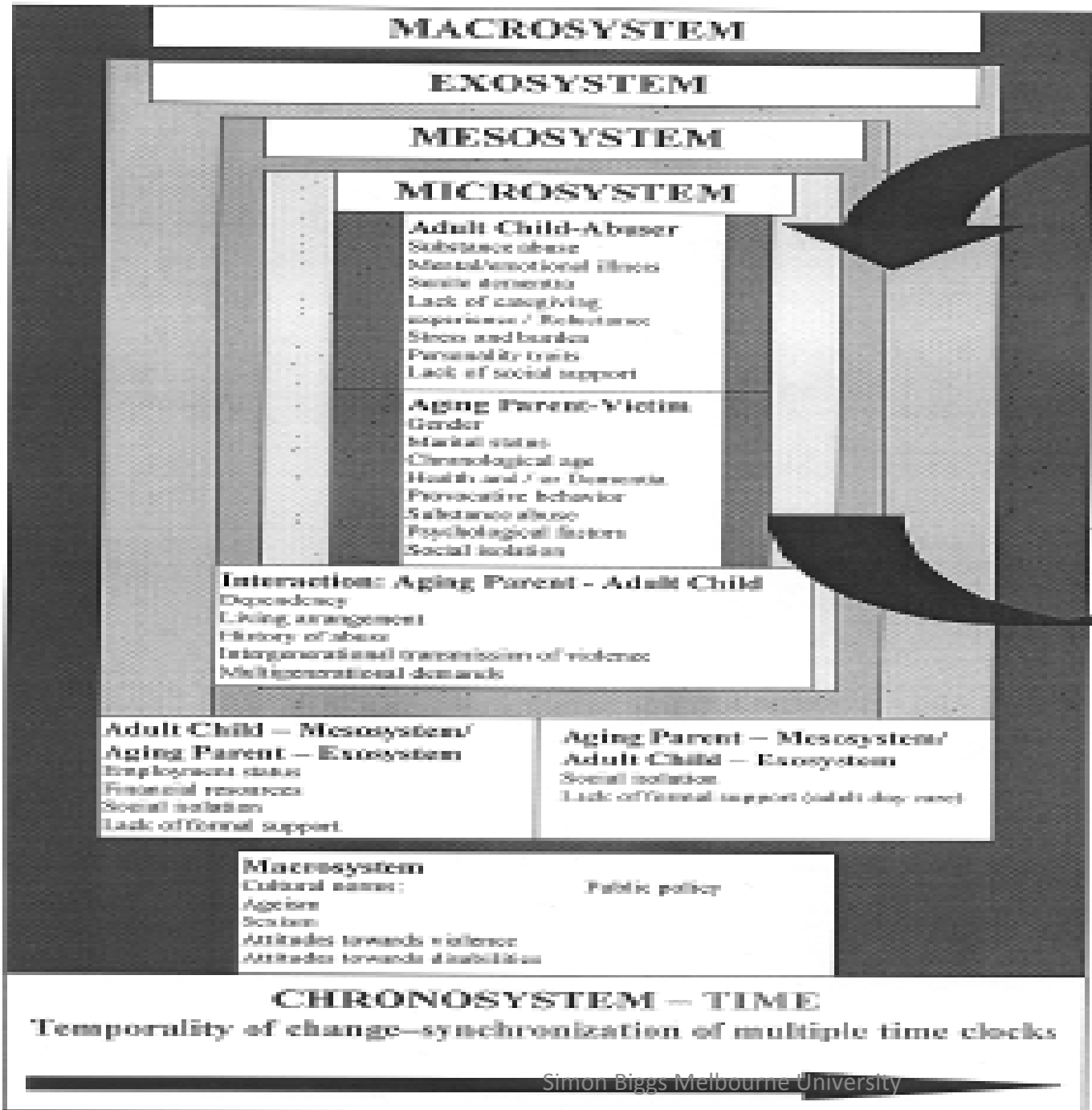
- An Adult-Adult Affair
- Self , Other or Service Neglect
- Horizons of Abuse
- The Capacity Continuum
- Multi-Professionality
- Theoretical and Procedural Imports

Ageism as the permissor for Abuse

But How exactly?

From Boxes to Boundaries

Modelling Abuse and Social Relations



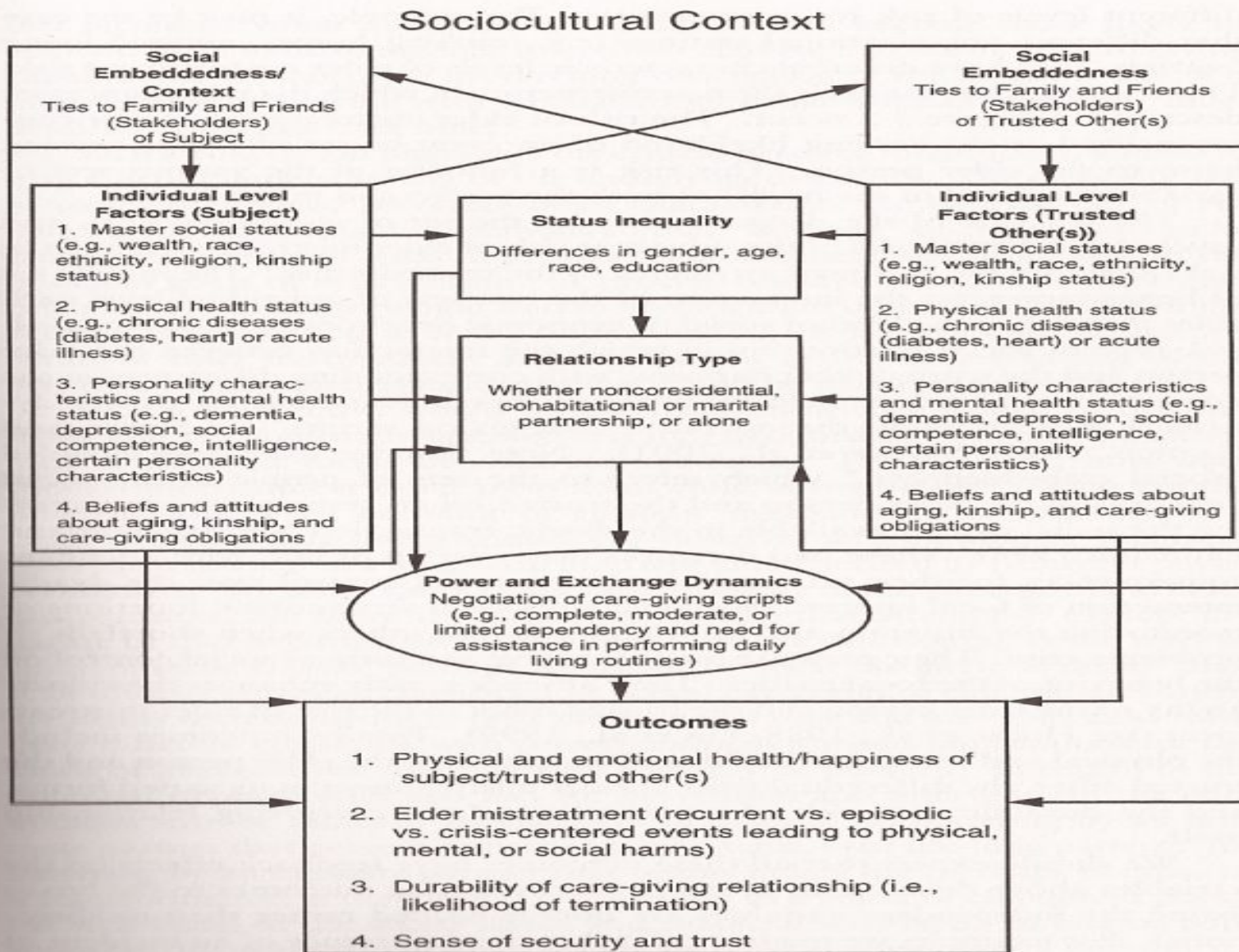


FIGURE 3-2 A schematic outline of the model for elder mistreatment.

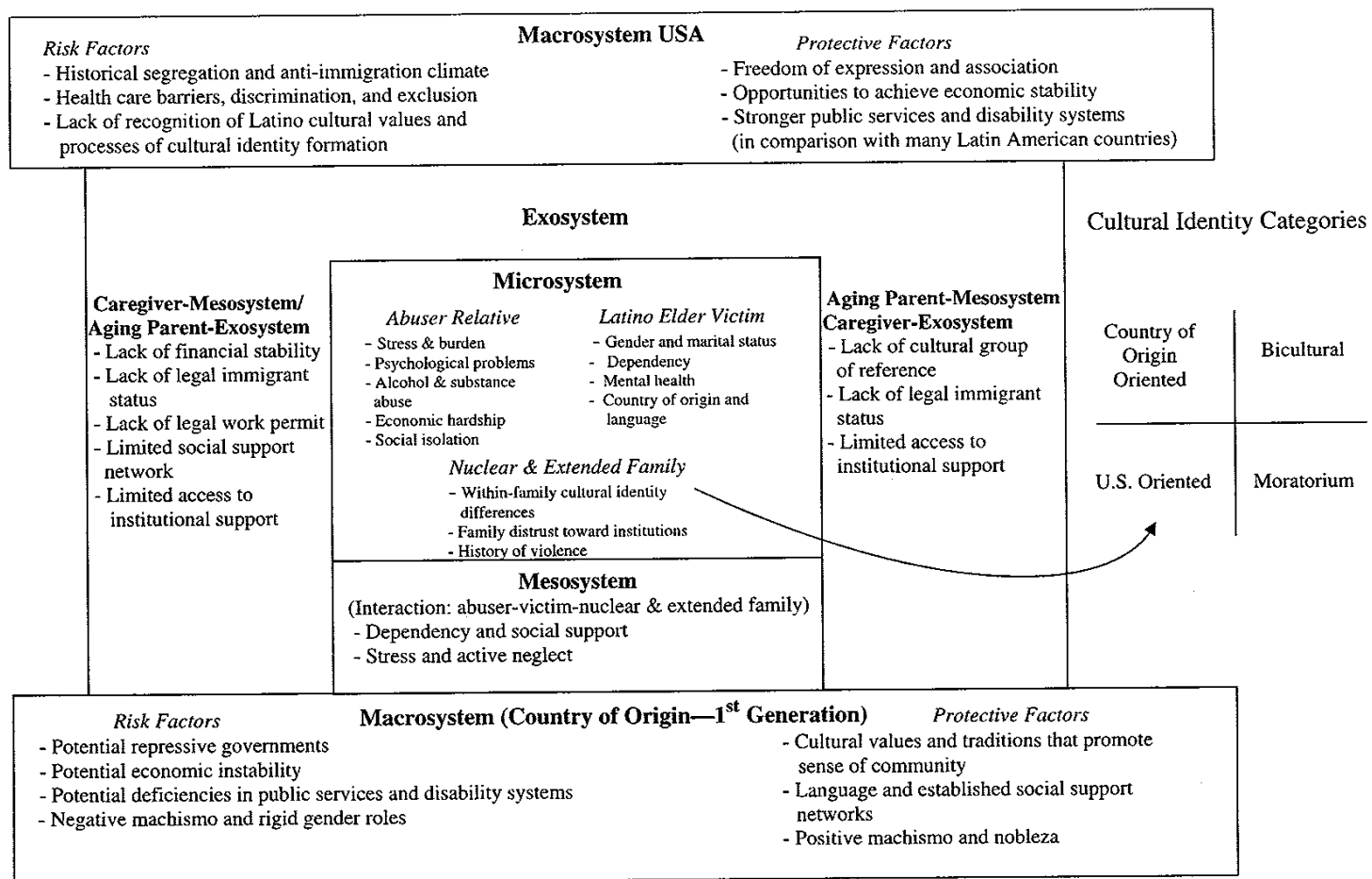


FIGURE 1 Integrative Model of Latino Elder Abuse

The Box Approach

- Marked by discrete phenomena
- With interaction between them
- Embedded one within another
- Fixed boundaries

Exploring the Boundaries

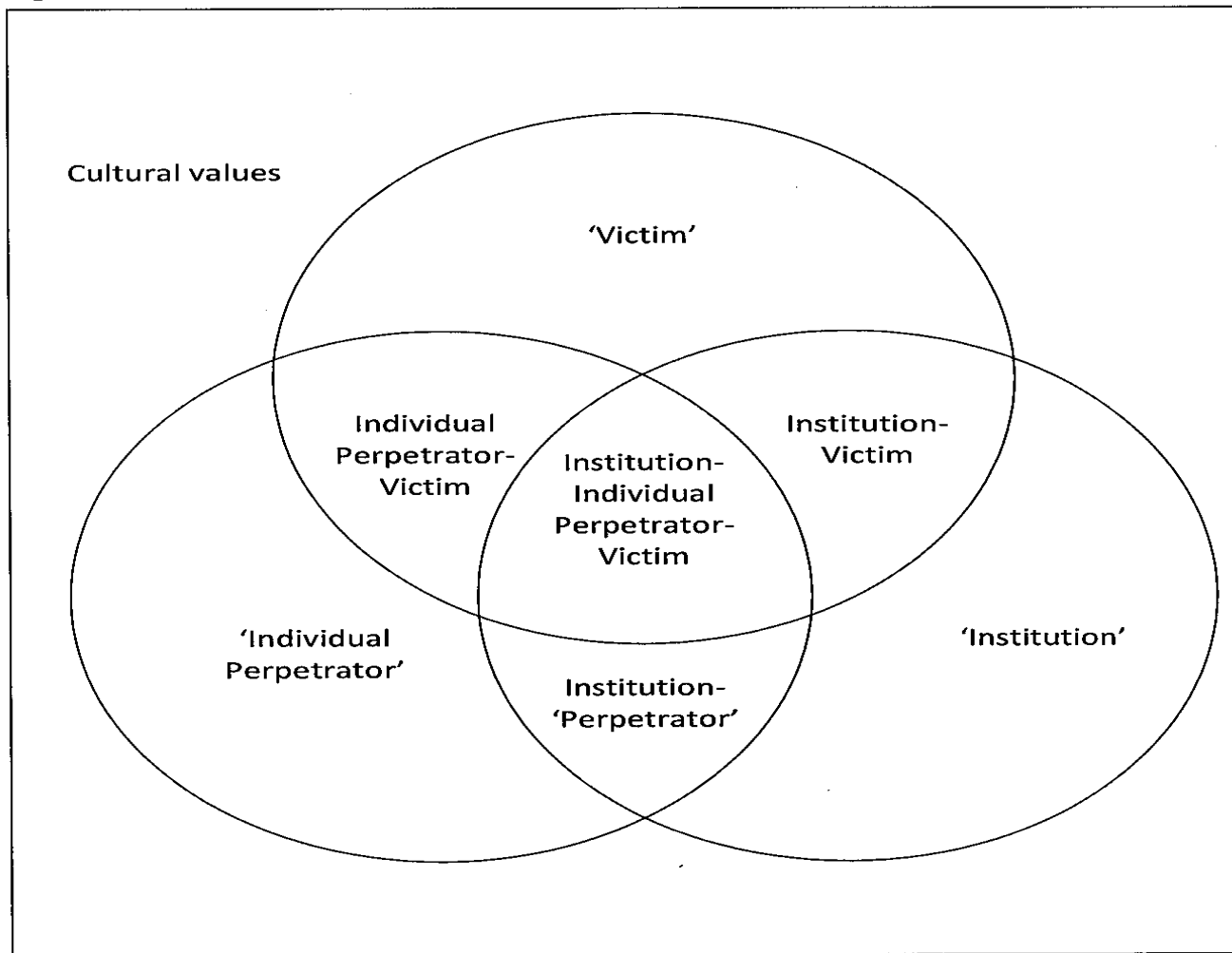
The Boundary Approach

‘Permissibility’ of action

Permeability of boundaries:

- Willingness to disclose
 - Possibility of trust
 - Ability to negotiate
 - Different types, different dynamics
-
- Overlapping risks

Figure Two – Integrative model for Interactions in elder mistreatment



The Venn diagram presented here is intended to outline a generic model that could be applied to understand the combination of influences at different levels of analysis. Individual Venn diagrams can be applied to each type of mistreatment so that diagrams can be produced to show the dynamics of financial, physical, psychological/emotional, physical and sexual abuse and various forms of neglect. In principle, the same diagram could be used to chart forms of dignity, as outlined by the European study (2001):

Identity and Boundary

Insider

Active

Perpetrator

Powerful

Bad

Outsider

Passive

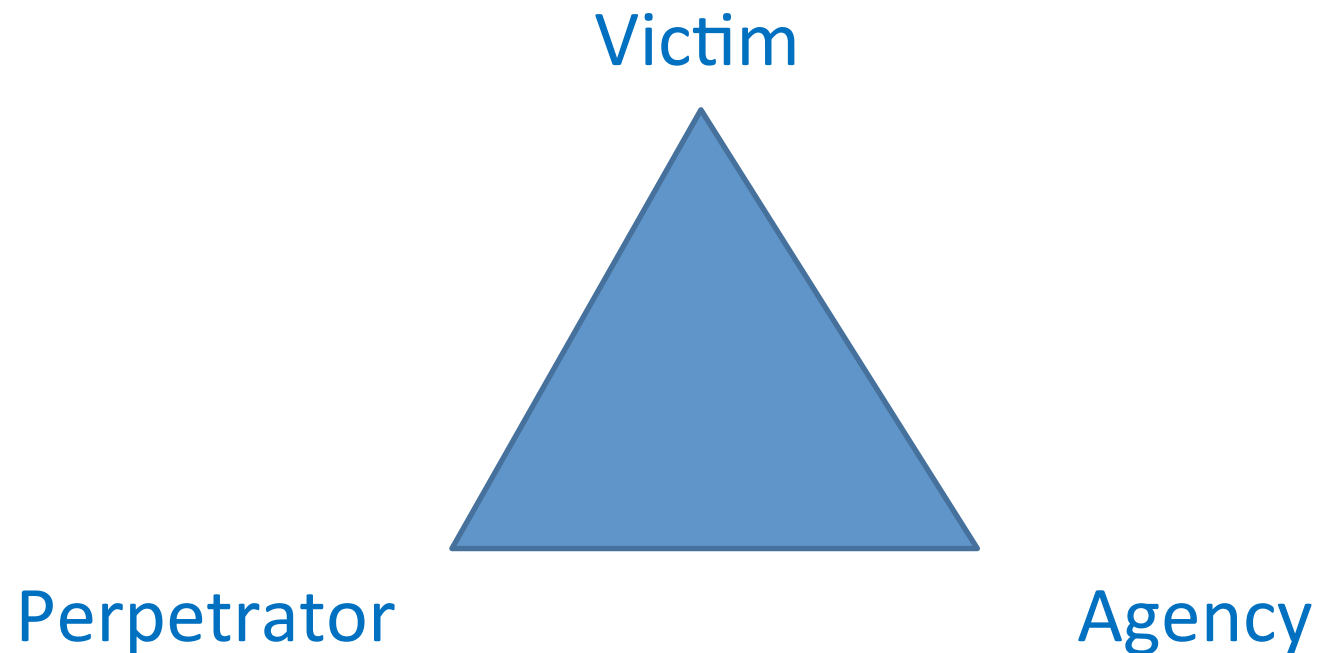
Victim

Weak

Good

Rigidity, Boundaries and Collusion

- Collusive Alliances



Working toward sustainable solutions

Containing Ambivalence

‘Containing emotion requires the simultaneous holding in mind of two seemingly incompatible aspects of the same thing.

It is necessarily to act knowingly, by being open to the possibility that one can feel both conflict and solidarity, love and hate in the same space’

Biggs & Lowenstein 2011

From Ambivalence to Ambiguity to Sustainability.

Solutions that will:

- Engage with the boundaries
- Stand the test of time
- Support negotiation
- Facilitate emotional sustainability

Learning from Ageism

- Rights approach- allows comparison across groups
- Institutional- allows comparison of context
- Othering- as common problem and a rigid boundary

Ageism & Abuse revisited

- Living with complexity
- Clarity of boundaries- otherwise phenomenon becomes meaningless
- Permeability within to acknowledge ambiguity or ambivalence
- Degrees to which Ageism acts as a permissor for Abuse

Managing Boundaries in an Age of Complexity

Hope that things can be different

From splitting to matters of degree

Spaces that can contain Ambivalence

Solutions that are manageable and sustainable

