

# Elder abuse by caregivers



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# Elder abuse or derailed care?

- Focus on family caregivers of people with dementia
- Difficult disease to cope with: cognitive, mood and behavioral problems
- High prevalence of psychopathology and feelings of burden among family caregivers
- 4 cases: stand up if you agree the presented case concerns elder abuse

## Cases

*1. Mr. Red helps his wife who has Alzheimer's Disease many hours per day, including bathing and dressing. A few days ago he asked his wife to undress herself as he would prepare the shower. When he came back into the bedroom, he saw his wife washing herself at the sink. He closed the tap of the sink with anger. Despite her resistance, he grabbed her tightly and pushed her into the shower.*

## Cases

*2. Mr. Blue, who has dementia, visits day care twice a week. Last night he got in and out the bed the whole night long. The next morning his wife feels exhausted. When she wants to put on his coat because he needs to go to the daycare center, Mr. Blue fiercely resists, because he wants to stay at home together with his wife. His wife tries to put on his coat. As he continues to resist, she loses her patience and slaps him.*

## Cases

3. Mrs. White is scared. Her husband with Alzheimer's Disease is not at home anymore. As she was ironing upstairs he apparently went outside. Fortunately, the neighbor brings him home after a short while. When the neighbor is gone, she shouts at her husband: "Don't do that again, or I will no longer care for you!"

## Cases

4. Mrs. Black was abused by her husband before he got dementia. Now she is caring for him. However, her frustration after being abused is difficult to deal with. Many times she tells her husband that he may be grateful after what he did to her and that she easily could harm him. She says things like: If you loose your way, don't expect that I will look for you!

# Elder abuse or derailed care?

- Definition

"All acts or the refraining from acts towards persons over 65 years of age, by those who have a personal or professional relationship with the older person, leading to (repeated) physical, psychological, and/or material damage" (Comijs, 1998)

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines elder abuse as "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." ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int))

# Elder abuse or derailed care?

More definitions are used

In common:

- physical, psychological, and/or material damage  
(Note: damage is difficult to measure in case of dementia)

Differences:

- yes or no damage on purpose, intentionally inflicted
- yes or no repeated behavior  
(Note: Do family caregivers have the intention to inflict damage?)



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## Abuse of vulnerable people with dementia by their carers: can we identify those most at risk?

Colm Cooney<sup>1\*</sup>, Robert Howard<sup>2</sup> and Brian Lawlor<sup>3</sup>

*Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* (1996) 31: 156–162

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ORIGINAL PAPER

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## Verbal and physical aggression against demented elderly by informal caregivers in the Netherlands

# Elder abuse or derailed care?

- Elder abuse the right word?
- stigma and double victims
- Family caregivers need help to prevent a next time!
- Also when there is no or hardly damage or if it is 'only' the first time

Study	N	Resp. rate	Measuring instrument	Period	Elder abuse (%)			
					Verbal	Physical	Neglect	Any
Paveza et al. , 1992	184	36%	CTS – Severe violence subscale	Year since diagnosis		5		
Pot et al, 1996	169	97%	Questions Homer & Gilleard (1990)	1 year	30.2	10.7		41
Compton et al, 1997	38	78%	Not standard	1 year	34	10.5	0	37
Cooney et al, 2006	82	93%	CTS + own items	1 year	51	20	4	
Cooney et al.	67	34%	Not standard	1 year	52	12		55
Coyne et al.	342	34%	Own questions	Time caring		12		
Pillemer	236	60%	Own questions	Time caring		5.9		
Cooper et al, 2009	220	69%	Modified CTS	past 3 months	33	4		52
Cooper et al, 2010	319		Modified CTS	past 3 months				48.1 61.8
Yan & Kwok, 2010	122	90%	Modified CTS	1 month	62.3	18		62.3

Independent variable	Pot et al, 1996	Compton et al, 1997	Cooney et al, 2006	Cooper, 2010
Sharing same household	s	n.s	-	
Caring for a male recipient	s	-	-	
Being a spouse	s	-	-	
Caring for a more cognitively impaired elder	s	n.s.	n.s.	
Higher levels of behavioral problems	n.s.	s	s	
Caring for an elder who is more dependent in ADL/IADL	s	n.s.	n.s.	
More psychological distress	s	s	s	s
Not receiving help	-	s	-	
Premorbid relationship	-	s		

# Summary 'elder abuse' by family caregivers of people with dementia

1. be careful with the word 'elder abuse'
2. prevalence rates high
  - especially for chronic verbal aggressive behavior
  - less for physical aggressive behavior
  - neglect hardly studied
3. caregivers' psychological distress related to aggressive behavior of person with dementia

=> It seems that caregivers who are burn-out are at risk for aggressive behavior towards the person with dementia

Thank you for your attention!

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