

Incidence of Elder Abuse within Ventura County

Summary

The issue of elder abuse is a topic of much concern within Ventura County with an estimated 1,200 cases reported during the period from July 2002 through June 2003. This report on elder abuse seeks to describe the extent of the problem, to acknowledge the various resources and organizations available that can be utilized to address this concern and to identify the agency procedural steps developed to reduce the incidence of the elder abuse problem.

Background

The inquiry into elder abuse report can be referenced to a presentation provided to the 2003-2004 Grand Jury by the Director of the Ventura County Human Services Agency (VCHSA), on the function of the agency and a reference to the issue of elder abuse. The brief discussion on the topic required that a subsequent meeting be held with Human Services Agency officials to obtain further information on the subject.

There are various forms of elder abuse (physical, sexual, financial, abandonment, abduction, emotional/psychological, isolation, and neglect) and the Grand Jury was interested in obtaining further information on the causes of elder abuse and preventive steps being developed to address this issue.

Methodology

The approach to the concern on elder abuse focused on the necessity to receive extensive elder abuse information from the Human Services Agency regarding statistics on the incidence, location, and the ethnic backgrounds of the victims of elder abuse. The objective was to ascertain the level of the problem and determine if there were any specific individuals or ethnic groups that appeared to be especially vulnerable to forms of elder abuse. A meeting was scheduled by the Grand Jury with the Director and his Adult Protective Services (APS) staff to attempt to address the elder abuse issue in greater depth.

The Grand Jury sent a letter to the Director of VCHSA with a list of 14 questions regarding the topic of elder abuse. The responses to these questions would provide the necessary background information to formulate the findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report.

The Grand Jury reviewed literature provided by Ventura County agencies that are directly involved with the issue of elder abuse. Furthermore, the Grand Jury reviewed information from a newly formed Ventura County Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST). The FAST literature review resulted in a greater understanding into the committee member team, mission statement and research capabilities into allegations of elder financial abuse that impacts a considerable number of Ventura County senior citizens.

Findings

- F-01.** The Ventura County Adult Protective Services Department breaks down statistical information on elder abuse into eight categories.
- F-02.** Within Ventura County, the City of Oxnard is the origin of the majority of the elder abuse case referrals followed by Simi Valley.
- F-03.** Statistics provided by the APS indicate the greatest percentage of referrals concerning elder abuse is in the category of financial abuse, followed by neglect, psychological/mental and physical abuse.
- F-04.** The incidence rate of elder abuse by category in Ventura County cities considers the relative percentage with respect to the overall population figures to determine the extent of the problem.
- F-05.** A review of APS statistics from July 2002 through June 2003 indicates that Caucasian and Hispanics are the ethnic groups with the greatest incidence of elder abuse in Ventura County.
- F-06.** The statistics provided by the County suggest equal numbers of referrals for alleged self-abuse or neglect to those referrals that identify a perpetrator.
- F-07.** The APS Program Administrator sits as a consultant on FAST and there is an open invitation to all APS social workers to attend the monthly FAST meetings.
- F-08.** APS takes an active role in assisting elders or dependent adults that are targeted by investment and telemarketing scams. APS reports the crime and the company to the appropriate oversight agency or any other request the elderly would have to protect them.
- F-09.** APS conducts monthly outreach meetings to educate elders and dependent adults on how to protect themselves and their assets as well as to agencies and programs who provide services to these populations.
- F-10.** APS provides quarterly training to mandated reporters (i.e. care custodians and health practitioners) who then train their staff on elder and dependent adult abuse and how to report it.
- F-11.** The reporting of elder abuse in Ventura County is accomplished through a contract with INTERFACE social service agency to manage a 24-hour hotline where calls are taken and referrals are directly faxed to the appropriate regional office. The office assigns the problem to a trained professional the same day. If there is an imminent danger, then a social worker responds immediately. Should no imminent danger exist, the state mandates a social worker to respond within ten calendar days.
- F-12.** APS receives a number of referrals for abuse and neglect from family, friends and neighbors of a senior victim. Referrals are also received from social workers and nurses of hospitals and home health agencies, law enforcement, fire departments, and Behavioral Health.

- F-13.** There does appear to be some hesitancy by elders to report abuse incidents, because the perpetrator is often an adult child, a grandchild, a spouse, or a parent.
- F-14.** There seems to be a certain level of shame in the admission that this person would take advantage of them or abuse them physically, or that the elder would willingly allow this type of situation to occur.
- F-15.** There is also the fear that once the abuse is reported, the elder or dependent would have to leave their home.
- F-16.** The Program Administrator of APS is responsible to train mandated reporters on their legal responsibilities to report abuse and neglect of elders and dependent adults. Training is performed on a monthly basis either at the request of the employer or at the offer of Adult Protective Services.
- F-17.** The APS and the District Attorney's Victim Assistance Unit are on the Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Council where they conduct joint presentations to the public as well as other agencies on the topic of elder abuse.
- F-18.** Human Services Agency's social workers work closely with the Victim Assistance Unit when one of their clients is in need of a restraining order or someone to accompany them to court.
- F-19.** The elder population in the United States is increasing and California has the highest elder population in the country. This requires substantial state and federal funding to address senior issues including elder abuse.

Conclusions

- C-01.** The incidence of elder abuse is on the rise within Ventura County. The APS is actively involved in a public education program to increase the general public awareness, concerning the necessity of assisting individuals who are involved with elders so that they are less at risk. APS educates them in how to report incidences of abuse affecting seniors.
(F-01, F-02, F-03, F-04, F-05, F-06, F-19)
- C-02.** The APS staff has developed a comprehensive plan to address the incidence of elder abuse through the established network with the District Attorney's Office, FAST and other agencies within Ventura County.
(F-09, F-10, F-11, F-12, F-14, F-15, F-16, F-17)
- C-03.** The APS staff has developed a comprehensive training program for its social worker staff and the mandated reporters to address the elder abuse problem.
(F-07, F-10)

Recommendations

- R-01.** There is a need for an increased level of outreach with the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Victim Assistance Unit, and the FAST to immediately address the critical needs identified in the elder abuse problem within Ventura County.
- R-02.** The increasing elder population within Ventura County requires that additional funding be sought to adequately serve elder abuse victims either through federal grant funding or appropriations from the County's general fund when adequate funding reserves are available.
- R-03.** The Ventura County Area Agency on Aging should assume a more active role on the issue of elder abuse either through its Advisory Council Meetings or staff involvement with the APS.

Responses Required

Recommendations	R-01	R-02
Responses Required From:		
Board of Supervisors		X
Ventura County District Attorney's Office	X	

Responses Requested

Recommendations	R-01	R-02	R-03
Responses Requested From:			
Human Services Agency	X	X	X
Area Agency on Aging			X