

Neuropsychological Profiles of Victims of Financial Elder Exploitation at the Los Angeles County Elder Abuse Forensic Center

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The current article examines neuropsychological correlates of financial elder exploitation in a sample of older adults who have been documented victims of financial elder exploitation. The purpose of this exploratory study was twofold. First, a subsample of the referrals at the Los Angeles County Elder Abuse Forensic Center (LACEAFC) was compared to community dwelling adults in terms of the specific cognitive domains linked to financial capacity including memory, calculation, and executive functioning. Next, the correlation between presence of neuropsychological data and

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the likelihood of filing a case with the LA County's District Attorney office was examined. Twenty-seven LACEAFC cases and 32 controls were assessed. Overall, the forensic center group performed worse than a community-based age-matched control group on the MMSE, calculation, and executive functioning ($ps < .01$). The presence of neuropsychological data was significantly correlated to an increased likelihood of a case being filed.

KEYWORDS financial abuse, forensic centers, neuropsychology

Financial elder exploitation (FE) is an increasing problem for vulnerable elders and for the social service and criminal justice system designed to protect them. According to a recent New York Times editorial: “the cost (of FE), on top of the human suffering, is immense: in stolen and squandered savings; the strain on the court system from abusive guardianships; the cost to Medicare and Medicaid from fraud; and from the care of fleeced victims who end up destitute in nursing homes” (Broken Trust, 2011). FE has been defined as the illegal or improper use of vulnerable adults’ funds or property for another person’s profit or advantage (AARP, 2006; National Center on Elder Abuse, 1998). Common types of exploitation include illegal transfer of real property, estate changes, unauthorized ATM charges, overcharging for services, forged checks, and obtaining assets by framing them as “gifts.” The current exploratory paper examines neuropsychological correlates in a sample of older adults who have been documented victims of FE and analyzes outcome data to begin to examine the relationship between the presence of neuropsychological evidence and the prosecution of the case.

A recent GAO report (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011) summarizes the progress being made in estimating the prevalence and correlates of FE in older adults. A review of large, population-based studies designed to measure the extent of elder abuse describes three national incidence/prevalence studies that included FE: The National Elder Mistreatment Study (Acierno et al., 2009), “Elder Mistreatment in the US: Prevalence Estimates from a National Study” (Laumann, Leitsch, & Waite, 2008), and the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). One-year prevalence estimates for financial exploitation ranged from 3.5% to 5.2%. Another population-based study that specifically targeted financial exploitation using both in-person and telephone interviewing reported estimates of 8.4% for non-African American adults aged 60 and over and 23.0% for African American older adults since turning 60 (Beach, Schulz, Castle, & Rosen, 2010). A study by Acierno and colleagues (2010) indicated that prevalence estimates for recent FE in adults aged 60 and over ranged from 3.5% to 5.2%.