

Elder Abuse

Submitted by Phil Carruthers, Ramsey County Attorney's Office

Elder Abuse is one type of abuse of vulnerable adults.

The Ramsey County Attorney's Office launched an Elder Abuse Unit on January 1, 2009 to deal with this serious problem.

- It is focused on crimes committed against persons 65 or older who are victimized because of their age, vulnerabilities or family relationships.
- So far, cases charged have been for Theft by Swindle of an elderly person's money and real estate, usually by family members, as well as domestic abuse committed by family members against their parents.

The City of St. Paul has a training program to train police officers and investigators about the problem of elder abuse.

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office has an Elder Abuse Unit that started several years ago.

The Minnesota Attorney General's Office, through its Medicaid Fraud Division, has been active in prosecuting abuse of vulnerable adults and the elderly.

The extent of elder abuse and some of the unique issues in this type of crime are shown by the following studies and statistics:

- Between 2000 and 2030, the number of people in the U.S. older than 65 is expected to double, to over 71 million. The US Census reports that the 85 plus group is the fastest growing demographic; the number of people 85 and older could quadruple by 2050. Brenda Uekert, Interdisciplinary Recommendations on Court Responses to Elder Abuse, National Center for State Courts, 2007.
- Society views elderly persons differently from others, often with prejudice. Deborah Henderson et al., "Elder Abuse: Guidelines for Treatment," Handbook of Forensic Psychology 746 (William O'Donohue and Eric Levensky eds., 2004).
- The overwhelming majority of elder abuse occurs in domestic settings and most alleged perpetrators are adult children, spouses, partners or other family members. The US Administration on Aging, The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, Final Report, 4-28, Sept. 1998.
- Elder abuse is a severely underreported crime. According to the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, only 16% of cases of the elderly abused or neglected in domestic settings were reported to and substantiated by adult protective services. 84% of cases were not reported. Id. at 4.

- Current estimates suggest there may be at least five million elderly victims of financial abuse each year. John F. Wasik, "The Fleecing of America's Elderly," Consumers Digest (March/April 2000).
- At anytime, between one and two million vulnerable elders may be experiencing mistreatment. National Research Council Panel to Review Risk and Prevalence of Elder Abuse and Neglect, Elder Mistreatment: Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation in Aging America, 2003.
- According to St. Paul Police Sgt. Ann Bebeau, about 800 suspected elder-abuse cases are reported in St. Paul each year. Pat Pheifer, Star Tribune, May 5, 2008.
- Elder abuse cases can be challenging to prosecute. A survey of prosecutors found that among the challenges are diminished mental capacity and physical health issues of the victim, lack of victim cooperation, undue influence and witness intimidation. Mark L. Miller and James L. Johnson, Protecting America's Senior Citizens: What Local Prosecutors are Doing to Fight Elder Abuse, American Prosecutors Research Institute, 2003.