Elder Abuse in Italy:
Selected findings from the ABUEL Project


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IFA 11TH GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING
28 May – 1 June 2012 Prague - Czech Republic
The elder abuse phenomenon in recent years has reached a remarkable international importance. This is a complex phenomenon, still not much studied in Italy, but also in Europe.

The prevalence of the phenomenon reaches, according to methodology and context adopted, values between 3% and 27% of the older population.

The abuse can cause in the older person physical and mental health problems and a general reduction in quality of life, because it can be a possible source of sufferings, wounds or pain.
BACKGROUND [2]

CATEGORIES: psychological, physical, sexual, financial. Furthermore, neglect and human rights violations should be added.

LOCATION: it can happen in different places: at home (harder to investigate); in residential structures (where it emerges thanks to NAS periodic inspections) or in public places too.

TIME: occasional or repeated action.
OBJECTIVES

The study is aimed at identifying the key risk factors and the possible consequences of a real phenomenon but yet largely invisible and neglected, not only due to difficulties of detection, but also because this is still a taboo hard to tackle in the aging population debate.
METHODS [1]

Results are based on the survey analysis of the ABUEL (“Elder Abuse”) project, coordinated at an international level by the Karolinska Institute of Stockholm and financed for 2008-2010 in the research programmes area activated by the European Agency for Public Health.

Seven European Countries took part to the survey: Italy, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

The survey reached a random sample stratified by sex and age of 4467 subjects overall.
Study objective: MF population aged between 60-84 years, with no dementia and living at home.

They were investigated on health conditions, quality of life and possible difficult situations, including the occurrence of experiences of mistreatment and abuse.

In Italy (Ancona), 628 subjects have been interviewed, 270 men and 358 women
ABUEL

ITALIAN SAMPLE

SELECTED RESULTS
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS
% victims of abuse (n = 628)

Note: unweighted results
% victims of abuse by gender (n = 84)

39.3% females

60.7% males
% victims of abuse by age class
(n = totals of each category)

- 60-64: 10.6%
- 65-69: 8.5%
- 70-74: 29.5%
- 75-79: 3.1%
- 80-84: 15.5%
% victims of abuse by educational level
(n = totals of each category)

- Incomplete primary sc.: 22.2%
- Primary school: 12.4%
- Secondary/high school: 13.3%
- University/post unv.: 13.2%
% victims of abuse by marital status (n = totals of each category)

- single: 8.3
- married/cohabitant: 14.4
- divorced/separated: 23.1
- widowed: 7.2
% victims of abuse by living situation  
(n = totals of each category)

- alone: 7.3%  
- only with spouse/partner: 14.0%  
- with spouse/partner & others: 15.3%  
- without spouse/partner, but with others: 13.2%
% victims of abuse by professional condition  
(n = totals of each category)

- armed forces
- housewives: 11.7%
- artisans and workers: 22.7%
- agriculture, forestry: 12.8%
- technicians, clerks, skilled prof.: 12.2%
- managers e professionals: 13.7%
% victims of abuse by main income source
(n = totals of each category)

- Salary: 11.1%
- Pension: 13.3%
- Disability pens., care allowance, various subsidy: 26.7%
- Partner's income: 12.7%
Therefore they are the most disadvantaged and potentially victims of social exclusion.
HEALTH CONDITIONS & LIFESTYLES
Note: **GBB scale** is made of 4 subscales, i.e. Stomach Discomfort, Heart complaints, Exhaustion tendency and Body aches rating 0-96. High scores correspond to high levels of somatic complaints.
Note: WHOQOL-OLD scale is made of 24 items (graded 1-5) divided into 6 subscales (each with 4 items), i.e. sensory abilities, autonomy, past, present and future activities, social participation, death and dying and intimacy. High scores correspond to high QOL (total/sub-scales).
% probability of anxiety and depression in victims and not-victims of abuse (n = total of each category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium/Low</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>81.7</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: Depression and anxiety were measured with Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) with contains 14 questions (graded 0-3), 7 each about depression and anxiety. High scores correspond to high depression and anxiety levels.
ABUSE CHARACTERISTICS
type of abuse and neglect
(% total answers: n=101
one or more kind for each victim)

psychological: 69.3%
financial: 16.8%
physical: 5.9%
sexual: 3.0%
injuries: 0%
prevalence type of abuse and neglect
(% total answers: M=270; F=358; MF=628)
% main episodes/events of psychological abuse (one or more episode for each type; n = 167)

- exclusion: 11.4%
- upset, spite: 12.6%
- diminish what OP does: 13.8%
- insult: 21.0%
- yell: 23.4%

% main episodes/events of financial abuse (one or more episode for each type; n = 22)

- tried to get to money/objects: 9.1%
- deception to steal money/objects: 22.7%
- stolen money/objects: 45.5%
% psychological abuse perpetrators (n = 89)

- Spouse/partner: 20.3%
- Children and grandchildren: 13.4%
- Friends and neighbors: 28.2%
- Other relatives: 14.5%
- Others: 23.6%

% financial abuse perpetrators (n = 17)

- Spouse/partner: 0%
- Children and grandchildren: 17.6%
- Friends and neighbors: 5.9%
- Other relatives: 76.5%
- Others: 0%
% perpetrators' characteristics for psychological abuse
(n = 85)

- Females: 36.5%
- Males: 63.5%

% perpetrators' characteristics for financial abuse (n = 17)

- Females: 5.9%
- Males: 94.1%
% places for psychological abuse (n = 91)

- Victim's home: 37.4%
- Others' house: 14.3%
- Public places: 27.5%
- Other places: 20.9%

% places for financial abuse (n = 17)

- Victim's home: 41.2%
- Others' house: 35.3%
- Public places: 35.3%
- Other places: 23.5%
% reactions for psychological (n = 117) and financial (n=26) abuse (oe or more reaction)

- no reaction: 3.8% financial, 6.0% psychological
- verbally: 11.5% financial, 37.6% psychological
- walked away: 7.7% financial, 13.7% psychological
- reported the incidents: 6.0% financial, 38.5% psychological
- emotionally: 38.5% financial, 35.9% psychological

Financial and psychological reactions are compared for psychological abuse.
reports number of psychological (n = 7) and financial (n = 10) abuse

- others: 2
- neighbors: 1
- family: 2
- police: 10

- psychological
- financial
CONCLUSIONS [1]

Presence of abuse episodes, as perceived and reported by older respondents, were detected.

Needs:

- to enlighten in a rigorous and systematic way this phenomenon
- cooperation of all committed in improving older people living conditions to prevent abuse episodes
- collective actions to create effective support systems
- legal and psychological support to facilitate an adequately protected reporting activity

In Italy there are currently no legal measures and specific intervention policies dedicated to older victims of abuse, while they are addressed to other potentially vulnerable population.
CONCLUSIONS [2]

The information provided by ABUEL study can be **useful starting points** for policy makers, developers and planners of healthcare services, local service providers and older people associations in order to reach the formulation of:

- **methodologies and tools** aimed at detecting the phenomenon on time and applicable at an international level;

- **guidelines** for the implementation of measures and actions supporting older victims of abuse;

- **policies and strategies** aimed at monitoring and preventing the emerging of the phenomenon.
CONCLUSIONS [3]

Precisely in this area, as a concrete answer to the needs arising from the ABUEL study, INRCA has recently activated (November 2010) a **telephone service** for the collection of reports of abuse coming from older people.

THANK YOU!