

# World Elder Abuse Awareness Day offers chance to break the silence

**Art Mason and Kelly Zunner-Daniels, Guest Essayists**

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“How could this happen to me?”

This is just one of many reactions of hurt and disbelief that Lifespan’s Elder Abuse Prevention program social workers hear from victims of elder mistreatment and financial exploitation. The trauma of elder abuse expresses itself in many ways: confusion, anger, regret, depression. Underlying the difficult feelings is a deep sense of betrayal by trusted family members and friends.

Most elder abuse is hidden, yet it occurs in all income strata, in all neighborhoods and in families you would never suspect. All too often, victims are too ashamed, too frightened to tell someone, to ask for help. From a 2011 incidence study, we estimate that only one in 24 instances of abuse is ever reported. In our state, we also estimate 260,000 older adults experience elder abuse each year. We also know from our data that adult sons and daughters are the most common perpetrators of abuse. We struggle to understand such behaviors.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is Friday, June 15. Begun in 2006, the occasion is designed to raise public awareness of this too often hidden social and public health problem. On June 15 day, downtown Rochester buildings, and even Niagara Falls, will be illuminated in purple to draw attention to this growing problem.

There are real people behind the statistics – grandmothers, fathers, aunts, neighbors. This year, we also want to observe the day by giving voice to victims who are too fearful, too ashamed, too isolated to speak up for themselves. We would like to share some of their comments about experiencing elder abuse/financial exploitation:

“I think I need to ask for help. I don’t want to get her in trouble, but I think she’s taking my money. She keeps telling me not to worry, that she has it under control. But I want to be involved in my own affairs.”

“She is angry, and can be violent. I know I can’t make her get help, so I have to figure out how to protect myself. I feel like other people in my family don’t really understand.”

“They told me they were borrowing a little money from my account, but I didn’t know they were going to take almost all of my money over a short period of time.”

“When he comes to my house asking for money, he gets loud and the neighbors hear him. It’s embarrassing, so I let him in and give him money to make him go away.”

"He really scares me at times, I know it’s time to make a decision."

"This isn’t what I would have wanted her to do with my money."

"I have no one, no one I can trust. My family only cares about my money, I have to do what is necessary to protect myself from them."

Elder abuse thrives in silence. If you or someone you know is experiencing mistreatment, please break the silence by calling the Upstate Elder Abuse Center at Lifespan at (585) 244-8400. We work in the ten-county Finger Lakes region.

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