

THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF VULNERABLE ADULTS IN INSTITUTIONS NATIONAL RESEARCH STUDY OVERVIEW

This overview is provided for your information only: no additional action is required by a facility for the research study. Texas is one of five states chosen to participate in a national research study entitled *The Sexual Abuse of Vulnerable Adults in Institutions* funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA). Data collection for the study will occur from **May 1, 2005, through November 1, 2005**, for nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and intermediate care facilities serving persons with mental retardation or a related condition. The study seeks to capture data on all reports received and investigated regarding sexual abuse of vulnerable adults in institutions during that time. Data will be collected via a study questionnaire completed by Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) staff on individual investigations of sexual abuse. It should be stressed that the purpose of the study is not to assign blame for incidents of sexual abuse that may occur in a facility, but rather to improve investigatory techniques and better understand the characteristics of those individuals who become victims, so they may be better protected in the future.

This study overview was compiled from the original grant application submitted by the University of Kentucky Research Foundation to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the study summary used by the State of New Hampshire, and information supplied by study personnel.

Background

In 2000, regulatory/protective services state agencies received 473,095 domestic (i.e., community) and institutional (i.e., nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and group homes) reports of abuse, neglect, or exploitation concerning vulnerable adults. Included in that number were 4,150 reports of sexual abuse, a number suspected to be highly under-reported due to differing reporting categories and the subject's taboo nature. Sexual abuse runs the gamut from kissing and fondling to forcible rape, and, as confirmed by earlier studies, results in a diminished quality of life and, often, premature death. Because sexual abuse poses a significant public health and public safety problem requiring government intervention, this study is grounded in democratic governance theory, which emphasizes responsiveness, representation, and responsibility through government intervention. The specific aims of the study are to:

- (1) investigate patterns of the sexual abuse of vulnerable older and younger adults living in long-term care institutions;
- (2) test a web-based system for obtaining sensitive and confidential information on the sexual abuse of vulnerable adults; and
- (3) refine an emergent theory of the mistreatment of vulnerable adults derived from democratic governance theory.

Study

This multi-state study, which is focused on five states (New Hampshire, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin), will utilize survey data provided by state protective and regulatory staff regarding all sexual abuse reports received and investigated. During the six-month data collection period, it is expected that there will be a total of at least 776 reports received, with 389 reports investigated, and 187 reports substantiated.

Data collection will be undertaken using a web-based protocol in combination with secure e-mail, fax, and conventional mail. Computer passwords will be assigned and firewalls constructed so that no person providing data is able to view another's data. To check for reliability of survey data, principal study investigators and state protective/regulatory services staff will check records and complete in-depth telephone interviews regarding only those reports

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that were received and investigated. For investigated and substantiated reports concerning *nursing facility residents only*, data from the resident's Minimum Data Set (MDS), a standardized tool for assessing the functional capacity of residents of long-term care facilities, will be collected six months prior to the report made at the time of the abuse, and six months after the incident to provide a before-and-after picture of the resident who was sexually abused. In recognition of the privacy issues involved, the study will not connect the resident to the allegation. Indeed, through negotiations with the Research Data Assistance Center/Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the study panel will obtain MDS data for the sexually abused nursing facility residents without any identifying information provided to the members of the research team other than the study questionnaire number. In order to protect confidentiality, the study panel will use neither names of individuals nor their social security numbers. State liaisons, employees of the respective state protective and regulatory service agencies, will track study questionnaire numbers with corresponding case file numbers so that the state liaisons may refer to the study questionnaire number and use it for case file confirmation in the 20% of records they will review for reliability of data completion.

Researchers

Pamela B. Teaster, Principal Investigator, has a Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Affairs and Graduate Certification in Gerontology. She has worked as a funded researcher since 1996. Recently, she worked on the first statewide evaluation of 10 public guardianship programs in the country, guardians' end-of-life decision-making for the incapacitated persons whom they serve, and a five-year study of the sexual abuse of vulnerable adults in Virginia. She has published in numerous peer-reviewed journals. She is conducting the first national study of public guardianship in 25 years, as well as a survey of Intimate Partner Violence of mid-life and older women in rural Kentucky. She participated in the 2000 Adult Protective Services Survey of Elder Abuse, and is currently Principal Investigator for the 2004 APS Survey of Elder Abuse. Dr. Teaster is responsible for the overall management, coordination, and products for this project.

Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik, Co-Investigator, has a Ph.D. in Sociology and Graduate Certification in Aging. Dr. Ramsey-Klawnsnik, a Licensed Mental Health Clinician, currently works in a psychotherapy, consultation, and training private practice; she also serves in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs Protective Services Program. Author of numerous articles and widely recognized as the national expert in this area, Ramsey-Klawnsnik will be responsible for refining and finalizing the survey instrument, attending meetings and training for data analysis, assisting with data collection and data analysis, training on sexual abuse, and writing the report.

Marta Mendiondo, Co-Investigator, has a Ph.D. in Statistics. Dr. Mendiondo is an Associate Professor in Biostatistics at the Sanders-Brown Center on Aging at the University of Kentucky and has worked on three NIA-funded research studies of Alzheimer's Disease. She will provide statistical consultation in all phases of the project.

Marilyn Whalen, M.S.S.W., APS Consultant, has worked with elderly clients for over thirty years. She serves as the Commissioner's Designee on the Tennessee Commission on Aging and advisor for The 50-State Survey of Adult Protective Services. She is a board member of the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and a founding member of that body. She is on the Tennessee Department of Mental Health Planning Council, Tennessee Department of Health, Task Force on Improving Patient Safety, and the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disabilities. She received the President's Award for National Association of Adult

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Protective Services Administrators. She recently retired as the Director of Tennessee Adult Protective Services.

Forrest Ewen, Consultant, has an Associate's Degree in Computer Science and is employed by the University of Kentucky as a data systems administrator and engineer. He worked for five years as a software tester, systems administrator, and engineer at Lexmark, which manufactures computers and printers. Before his employment at Lexmark, he worked for the Oldham County Board of Education for two years as the Assistant Director of Information Systems.

Erin Abner, Research Assistant, has a Master's Degree in English and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Health at the University of Kentucky. Before entering the University of Kentucky, College of Public Health, she spent two years working as the Project Manager on a NIMH-funded study of pregnancy, HIV, and other STD interventions for Appalachian youth with risky behaviors.

Andrew Horne, Research Assistant, has a Bachelor's Degree in biology and history. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Gerontology at the University of Kentucky's Graduate Center for Gerontology.

Study Benefits

When the research is completed, Drs. Teaster and Ramsey-Klawnsnik will come to each state and provide statewide training on sexual abuse of vulnerable adults and best practices as indicated by the results of the study. Both women are nationally respected researchers in this area.

Each state will be credited as a contributor to this groundbreaking study. The grant, funded by the National Institute on Aging, will elevate to the level of science the examination of sexual abuse of protected populations. To date, fewer than 15 studies of elder mistreatment have ever been funded by NIA. Such studies are needed critically to help theorists, practitioners and policymakers understand this form of abuse and lay foundations for greater national funding for protective and regulatory services. At this time, no federal funding of direct, protective services exists.

Role of State Protective/Regulatory Service Agencies

Data collection for the study will occur from May 1, 2005, through November 1, 2005. During that time, study investigators seek to capture data on all reports received and investigated regarding sexual abuse of vulnerable adults in institutions.

The main data will be collected via a study questionnaire completed by state agency staff on individual investigations of sexual abuse cases. The questionnaire covers three areas:

- reported allegations
- investigated allegations
- substantiated allegations.

Completing the questionnaire will take state agency staff a maximum of approximately 45 minutes, if the report is substantiated. Study investigators, consultant(s), and research assistants will provide computer and telephone support to state agency staffpersons completing the questionnaire.

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Prior to the start of data collection, at least one of the principal study investigators will come to each state (March - April 2005) and train designated staff who may be completing the questionnaires. Training is critical to the validity and reliability of the study.

In the first and third month of data collection, 20% of the cases referred to the study will undergo a file review to ensure data reliability. State liaisons will conduct the review. Fifteen percent of the cases in each state will also be selected randomly for a telephone interview. If a case is selected, study investigators will contact the state field investigator who completed the survey. Along with checking accuracy of data collected, the caller will record the perception of the field investigator on case procedures, practice, and training needs.

Minimum Data Set

For investigated and substantiated cases of sexual abuse that took place in a nursing facility, the study panel will examine MDS data to look for trends in the functioning and characteristics of sexual abuse victims. As part of the study, the panel will evaluate MDS data from two different points in time: six months prior to the report, made at the time of the abuse, and six months after the report.