

ELDER ABUSE IN ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES

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Q&A FOR DR. MOON

Q1: IS THERE AN API ELDER ABUSE HOTLINE?

- ✘ I don't think there is an API elder abuse hotline in California or anywhere in the United States.
- ✘ Elder abuse problems have long been neglected in most API communities, partially because, in my opinion, both the elderly and non-elderly people in the API communities do not want to talk about it since they feel it brings shame and disgrace to the family and the community. Also, some people don't even realize such problem exist because elder abuse is not a topic anybody wants to bring to family, social and community gatherings.
- ✘ On the other hand, some organizations in API communities have been able to have their own domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines in Asian languages. Good examples are the Center for Pacific Asian Family (which serves all API communities in LA) and the Korean American Family Service Agency in LA which has its own domestic violence and child abuse hotline in Korean.
- ✘ I assume that similar private non-profit organizations exist throughout the country. It would be a great idea to encourage those organizations with some technical and other assistance to add Elder Abuse hotlines to their existing hotlines.

Q2: WHAT ARE SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING AN INTERPRETER WITH AN API ELDER ABUSE VICTIM?

- ✘ As you may know, there should be several basic training requirements such as confidentiality, elder abuse legal and other frequently used terminologies in elder abuse, and the role of interpreter (example: interpreting exactly what are being said by the interviewer and caller). I am a volunteer interpreter myself and participated in a two-day interpreter training. Also, before asking any questions or discussing any elder abuse related matters, the interviewer/worker must assure the victim (of course through the interpreter) that the interpreter will keep all information/discussion confidential. In fact, it is even better if you can say that the interpreter has no access to the victim's personal information.
- ✘ Training is the key here. In fact, I've learned the skills of interpretation by doing it over a period of time... It is not something anyone can do easily simply because the person speaks the same language. In most cases, interpreting elder abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse cases requires training on terminology, attitudes (including the tone of interpretation) and commitment to helping those in need effectively as an interpreter.

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL CHANGE API SENIORS' ATTITUDES ABOUT TOLERATING ABUSE?

- ✘ In my opinion, it is difficult to change API seniors' attitudes about tolerating abuse unless they have the assurance that not tolerating abuse especially by family members, eventually helps both themselves and perpetrators in some concrete ways, not just "making things worse" in their own projections but restoring healthy relationships. The API seniors really need information about what happens when elder abuse is reported. As far as I know, most of API elders tie elder abuse reporting (which I think most of them are not even aware of it) to punishing perpetrators in legal terms. For this reason, besides family shame, many do not even consider reporting or talking about their suffering to others. For most of them, in my observation, reporting elder abuse is not even an option. Not only are they afraid of retaliation, but more importantly, they may feel so guilty that s/he cause a huge trouble for the perpetrator's future (unless s/he is a total stranger, who has done a very damaging thing against the older person).
- ✘ Therefore, there must be a community-wide effort (both young and old people included) in each API community to inform (1) what elder abuse is (wide range, not just extreme cases of EA), (2) how it affects the well-being of the victim - with culturally appealing stories, including filial piety, healthy extended family lifestyles, pain of silent senior victims, (3) what can be done to help the senior AND the perpetrator (who may have drinking, financial, family relationship problems, difficult childhood, etc.) by seeking help (APS, other social service agencies, etc), (4) the ultimate goal of the intervention is to restore safety and health of the older person... Especially, API community-based social service organizations should be the target for this information and education effort. For them, I would emphasize their roles and responsibilities as mandated reporters... Since most API older people are unlikely to report abuse, these community organizations truly have to step up to prevent and report EA!
- ✘ Continued on next slide...

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL CHANGE API SENIORS' ATTITUDES ABOUT TOLERATING ABUSE?

- ✘ ANSWER PART 2

- ✘ In API communities, it is important to demystify how EA perpetrators' lives will be ruined in prison, or what kinds of punishment s/he will get. To put it differently, it is important to emphasize that ending elder abuse eventually helps the perpetrator in the short and long-run and that not all perpetrators end up in Jail. Some case stories should be shared to illustrate what happens to perpetrators and how reporting helps the victims and perpetrators. The focus should be on the well-being of the victim, and at the same time, it would be helpful to suggest that perpetrators also can get help from other sources (substance abuse, job training, housing, counseling, etc.). Indeed, this point about other ways of helping perpetrators will be a key to API community members and elder abuse victims to reconsider the idea of seeking outside help and reporting elder abuse to authorities or even a community service agency.
- ✘ Also, always, confidentiality and anonymity, whenever possible, should be emphasized in each API community. Although each API community varies in size and background, it is an ethnic community, and many people know each other in their social and professional lives. It is not only among the older people but also their children's generation whose family shame, in the incident of elder abuse, should remain within the family and confidential. Many API people came from countries where confidentiality was not highly respected even in the professional world... Again, the notion that "I don't want any of the people in my family, social and professional circles to find out about my family problems, especially something like abuse in the family" is very strong. There should be an absolute assurance to the victims and family members, especially in case of a family member being the perpetrator that none of the elder abuse case related information will be given to anyone else in their respective community.