

**ELDER ABUSE: MORE IS EXPECTED UNLESS SOCIETY AND
NEWSPAPERS [MASS MEDIA] INTERVENE**

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Elder abuse is a social illness of epidemic proportions in the United States and older Americans constitute one of the largest age groups in the nation. Ironically, there exists no comprehensive scientific study on the national incidence or prevalence of elder abuse in both institutional and domestic settings. However, state-based studies conducted over more than two decades show rampant elder abuse is a fact. Many factors contribute to the lack of research on a national scale including victims' underreporting of abuse for fear of retaliation. Lack of strong federal oversight of inconsistent, state-based laws and investigative procedures as well as widely varying definitions of what constitutes abuse or neglect are other key factors. In addition, researchers report a youth-oriented American culture dangerously discriminates against the old and this attitude contributes to the dehumanizing of older people. Academic and professional journals discuss elder abuse from many angles, and elder advocates publish information about the abuse of elders and urge communities to prevent abuse, but few if any point to mass media's role, particularly newspapers, in increasing public awareness of the problem. The purpose of this study is to attempt to explain the complex and pervasive phenomenon of elder abuse, to show newspapers in particular do little to expose it and thus contribute to it, and to suggest what society and newspapers should do to prevent elder abuse. Further, this study contributes to the body of research aimed at informing the public about elder abuse by explaining conditions in society that mitigate violence against old people, inspiring other researchers to accelerate investigations of it, and strongly suggesting newspapers expose and explain the daily reality and horror of elder abuse.

Key Words and Phrases: abuse, aged person, ageism, caregiver, child abuse, elder, elderly abuse, exploitation, euthanasia, frail elderly, geronticide, neglect, old-old, vulnerable adult, young-old

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