Abuse of the Elderly in Europe (ABUEL) (Principal investigator: Prof. Joaquim Soares, Sweden)

For the ABUEL study group
Prof. Dr. Jutta Lindert
Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Ludwigsburg

Paris, July 2009
Outline

• Prevalence of violence against the elderly (VAE), impact of VAE on physical and mental health, risk factors for VAE
• Aims of ABUEL
• Methods
• Expected outcomes
• Case vignettes
Elder abuse and neglect are increasingly a source of concern worldwide
Definitions of violence against the elderly (VAE)

- **Physical abuse**: the infliction of pain or injury, physical coercion, or physical or drug induced restraint

- **Psychological or emotional abuse**: the infliction of mental anguish

- **Financial or material abuse**: the illegal or improper exploitation or use of funds or resources of the older person

- **Sexual abuse**: non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with the older person

- **Neglect**: the refusal or failure to fulfil a caregiving obligation
Prevalence of VAE

• 2009: 49 studies investigating elder abuse and neglect:
  – 3%-38% of the elder general population reported VAE in the last month
  – a third of caregivers reported physical abuse towards care recipients
Prevalence of VAE

- Elder abuse and neglect data are shaky and inconsistent
- Lack of comparable European-wide data
Forms of VAE

- Domestic violence
- Street violence
- War
- Genocide
Impact of VAE on elder persons

• Increased mortality
• Impaired physical health
  Impaired mental health
  (e.g. depression, anxiety, somatoform disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder)
• Impaired quality of life
Risk factors for VAE

• Individual factors
  – e.g. financial difficulties

• Relationship factors
  – e.g. relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient before abuse

• Societal factors
  – e.g. cultural norms

• Previous exposure to violence
Limitations of available data on VAE

• Definition of violence
  – focus on domestic violence

• Time frame
  – abuse since retirement, abuse in the past year, lifetime abuse

• Validity of assessment methods and instruments
Aims of ABUEL

• To collect empirical data on
  – prevalence
  – characteristics
  – determinants of VAE and

• its physical and mental health outcomes

• to investigate risk factors by comparing groups
Methods

Design
• Cross-sectional 7-country survey (Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Sweden, Portugal, Spain)

Participants
• female/male
• aged 60-84 years
• living in urban centres
• living in domestic settings

Measures
• Standardized assessment tool
ABUEL assessment tool (basic part)

Violence

Socioeconomic-, demographic

Physical health

Quality of life

Social support

Mental health

Assessment tool
Socioeconomic/demographic variables: example of items

- Age
- Marital status
- Ethnicity
- Living conditions
- Education
- Profession
- Economic conditions
Physical health (SF-36): example of items

• Does your health now limit you in these activities?
  – Vigorous activities, such as running, lifting heavy objects, participating in strenuous sports
  – Moderate activities, such as moving a table, pushing a vacuum cleaner, bowling, or playing golf
  – Lifting or carrying groceries
  – Climbing several flights of stairs
Mental Health (HADS, GBB): example of items

- Depression
- Anxiety
  - I wake early and then sleep badly for the rest of the night
  - I get very frightened or have panic feelings for apparently no reason at all
  - I feel miserable and sad
- Somatoform disorders
Quality of life (WHO-QOL-OLD): example of items

- To what extent do impairments to your senses (e.g. hearing, vision, taste, smell, touch) affect your daily life?
- To what extent does loss of for example, hearing, vision, taste, smell or touch affect your ability to participate in activities?
- How much do you feel that the people around you are respectful of your freedom?
Violence

How many times in the past year has a person...

- ... insulted you or sworn at you
- ... threatened you (e.g. putting you in a nursing home, breaking things that you care about)
- ... undermined or belittled what you did
- ... excluded you or repeatedly ignored you
Social support (MSPSS): Examples of items

- There is a special person who is around when I am in need
- There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows
- My family really tries to help me
- I get the emotional help I need from my family
- My friends really try to help me
ABUEL assessment tool (additional part)

- Violence
- Socioeconomic-, demographic
- Previous violence exposure
- Physical health
- Social support
- Quality of life
- Mental health
Case vignette 1

Picture: WHO, 2002
Case vignette 2
Expected outcomes of ABUEL

• European comparable data
  – European data file will be ready at the end of September 2009
  – representative data on prevalence of abuse and neglect in 7 European countries will be available at the end of November 2009
  – knowledge on the factors associated with VAE
  – final data analysis will be available at the end of April 2010
Thank you for listening

http://www.abuel.org/