ELDER ABUSE

• a matter of collective concern
• Situate individual stories in larger social contexts
• Advance policies and systems-level solutions that prevent abuse and address it when it happens
Challenges in Public Thinking

- Can identify physical, emotional and neglect and > financial exploitation
- Reinforces that older people are vulnerable and helpless
- Fuels fatalistic attitudes
- Don’t think about sexual abuse....because think of older people being nonsexual
Testing of Alternative Messages

Key: systematic assessment of where and how public thinking differs from expert consensus
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Off the radar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How salient is Elder Abuse?</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>Off the radar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why does Elder Abuse happen?</td>
<td>Social structure</td>
<td>Individual moral deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should older adults be engaged and addressed?</td>
<td>Subjects to empower</td>
<td>Objects of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is responsible for dealing with elder abuse?</td>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Everyone/no one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can anything be done?</td>
<td>Meaningful solutions</td>
<td>Nothing much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should be done?</td>
<td>Systemic solutions</td>
<td>Individual solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Narratives

experts vs. public
Societal Structures – vs – Individual Moral Deficits

**experts**
- Societal structures interact and provide resources and support
- We put people in positions to commit abuse

**public**
- Focus on character & personality traits
- Border on victim blaming
- Intergenerational “payback”
Modern Life is the Problem

experts
• aligns with caregiver stress
• BUT leads to fatalistic attitudes

public
• due to shifts in American life
  • Family life and work
  • Pushes care givers to emotional limits
  • Nursing homes are unfortunate necessity
Subjects to Empower – vs – Objects of Care

experts

• Aging: aspirational
• Can include distinctive vulnerabilities
  • It is different for different people
  • Influenced by a wide variety of social factors
• Aging does not = decline
• Older Adults as full community participants

public

• Process of Deterioration, decline and increasing dependency
• Paternalism: older people treated as objects to be cared for and protected
  • Rather than empowered and engaged
  • Leads to inability hear the voices of older people

• Are able to think of older adults as equal subjects: Elders as Agents
Who is responsible for dealing with Elder Abuse?

experts
  • Society
  • Agree that we are all responsible for preventing elder abuse
    • through social institutions
  • We the People

public
  • Everyone/No One
  • Agree that all are responsible for prevention
    • IF it comes up in their lives
    • Take steps when we see elder abuse happen
  • Each of us individually
Can anything be done?

Experts
- Meaningful Solutions
- Funding and reform of Adult Protective Services
- Strengthening community supports
- Instituting multidisciplinary teams
- Funding research

Public
- Nothing Much
- Can’t identify an agent responsible for fixing the problem
- Fueled by Modern Life is the Problem
- Is inevitable aspect of modern life
- Assume the gov is incompetent and unable to solve difficult social problems
What should be done?

**public**
- Individual Solutions
  - Better surveillance
  - Better screening of care givers
- Tech to monitor care givers
- Friends and neighbors to check in
- Education and public awareness campaigns to change behavior of abusers to prevent it

**experts**
- System solutions
Strategically redirects thinking away from patterns such as:

- Paternalism
- Fatalism
- Spotlight on Individuals
- Modern Life Is the Problem
- Only Solution = Surveillance and Prosecution

The story you’re telling:
Creating a just society includes treating older people as equal members of that society. It also means making sure we are all connected to our communities as we age, so that we can prevent and address elder abuse.

Value
Justice
Why does it matter? What’s at stake?
Creating a just society includes treating older people as equal members and making sure we are all connected to our communities as we age, so that we can prevent and address elder abuse.
Justice

Refer to our shared belief in justice and equal treatment for all people, regardless of age, and inoculate against the tendency to see older people as “others.”

“We believe in a just society that recognizes that all people are equal. No matter how old we are, we are entitled to be treated as full members of our communities.”

“All people are created equal.”
Equal members of our communities

Demonstrate that current policies do not treat older people as equal members of our communities, which increase the risk of elder abuse.

We need policies that connect people to our communities at all stages of life. But our current policies increase social isolation. This puts older people at greater risk of neglect and abuse. It means all members of our society are not truly equal.
Justice

Connect initiatives to prevent and address elder abuse to the ability to fulfill our commitment to a just and equal society.

Our communities should be set up to prevent and immediately address elder abuse. This is what justice looks like.
Elder abuse is a difficult problem that affects us all—but solutions are available.

- Sympathy Trap ➔ Treating people fairly
- Tragic Story
- Financial Exploitation Trap
How to include individual cases of abuse?

Embed them within the Structure of Justice narrative

Our society is like a building:
It needs strong supports and secure beams to remain strong.
We need solid “social” beams in our society so that we can all participate fully in our communities as we age and live free from abuse.

Explain systems-level causes

When these supports are not in place, it is less likely that someone will notice if an older person is being abused or that survivors will be connected to health care providers or other professionals.
What should we do?

When older people are socially isolated, the risk of elder abuse increases because no one is around to detect it or assist if it occurs.

- Use Explanatory chains to illustrate how to prevent and address elder abuse
- Connect underlying causes and visible problems.
Safe and reliable public transportation reduces social isolation and helps prevent elder abuse.

- Social Isolation
  - Results from a lack of resources:
    - Public transportation... explain how they prevent problems
- Highlight collective solutions that are driven by structural changes.