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## Poly-victimization and resilience portfolios: Trends in violence research that can enhance the understanding and prevention of elder abuse

Sherry Hamby, PhD<sup>a</sup>, Alli Smith, BA<sup>a</sup>, Kimberly Mitchell, PhD<sup>b</sup>,  
and Heather Turner, PhD<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Life Paths Appalachian Research Center and Department of Psychology, University of the South, Monteagle, Tennessee, USA; <sup>b</sup>Department of Psychology, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA; <sup>c</sup>Department of Sociology, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, USA

### ABSTRACT

This literature review assesses the current state of knowledge about elder abuse and mistreatment, focusing on the lack of incorporation of all forms of elder victimization and the benefits of a poly-victimization framework. This review also includes existing knowledge on risk factors and calls for a greater focus on protective factors and a greater inclusion on family and community factors. Future research, prevention, and intervention would benefit from considering the true burden of elder victimization and a greater implementation of strengths-based approaches to programs.

### KEYWORDS

Elder abuse; elder mistreatment; poly-victimization; protective factors; resilience; review

Elders are a vulnerable population due to a variety of developmental changes that occur later in life; yet among elders there has been little study of poly-victimization, or the accumulation of multiple types of victimizations (Hamby & Grych, 2013). Existing literature shows that elders are vulnerable to a number of different types of abuse and mistreatment, including caregiver abuse, intimate partner violence, and financial exploitation (Acierno et al., 2010; Grossman & Lundy, 2003). However, the intersection among these and other forms of victimization experienced by older adults is only beginning to receive empirical study. In studies of youth and, to a lesser extent, nonelderly adults, the poly-victimization framework has shown that the total number of types of victimization is a better predictor of mental and physical health status than any single type of victimization (Cuevas, Sabina, & Picard, 2010; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011; Krebs, Breiding, Browne, & Warner, 2011; Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher, 2013; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010). The poly-victimization framework could similarly help advance our understanding of elder victimization by documenting the true cumulative lifespan burden of victimization for elders. We present a

**CONTACT** Dr. Sherry Hamby, PhD ✉ [sherry.hamby@lifepathsresearch.org](mailto:sherry.hamby@lifepathsresearch.org) 📍 Life Paths Appalachian Research Center, 1016 W. Main Street, Monteagle, TN 37356, USA.

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conceptual framework for poly-victimization among elders and review the current state of knowledge about the interconnections among forms of victimization that occur later in life. Following the most common nomenclature in the field, and also a term that connotes respect in many communities, we refer to this group, of those ages 65 and older, as “elders.” The article also reviews research on risk and protective factors and makes a case for greater attention to malleable protective factors as potential targets for prevention and intervention. (See [Table 1](#) for a list of key points.)

From the perspective of understanding the “web of violence”—all of the interconnections among forms of victimization—it is also important to understand how vulnerability to abuse in later life can be linked to earlier victimization experiences. We use the term “victimization” to refer to all acts that intentionally cause unwanted harm (Hamby & Grych, 2013). “Abuse” and “mistreatment” are related terms that normally imply a caregiver or familial relationship and can include a wide range of harms, such as financial exploitation as well as physical abuse. This review will also explore connections between the literature on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and elder victimization. ACEs have been shown to have detrimental health effects into late life, and some literature has shown that elder abuse is connected to prior trauma, but much more could be done to explore patterns of poly-victimization and revictimization across the life course (Acierno et al., 2010; Felitti et al., 1998). Poly-victimization also offers a coherent conceptual framework, meeting recent calls for more use of theory in elder victimization research (National Institute of Justice, 2014). A better understanding of these interconnections can inform prevention, intervention, and policy.

There is reason to believe that the true burden of violence sustained by elders is under-documented and does not capture the unique vulnerabilities of this life stage. Many national victimization surveys do not include types of

**Table 1.** Key points to advance research on elder victimization.

- 1) Elders are vulnerable to many different types of caregiver abuse, including physical abuse, psychological abuse, and financial exploitation. However, the true burden of victimization includes a range of other offenses, such as property crime, identity theft, adult bullying, bias crime, conventional crime, sexual victimization, and witnessing the abuse of family members.
- 2) The poly-victimization framework should be extended to the study of elder abuse to eliminate a “siloeed” approach to elder abuse research and to appreciate the full burden of elder victimization, especially in consideration of the accumulation of adversities throughout the lifespan.
- 3) Late life presents unique vulnerabilities to victimization, such as increased frailty, ageism, loss of social roles in retirement, and reliance on caregivers.
- 4) Elders also experience vulnerabilities that are not unique to late life, such as poverty, low educational achievement, prior trauma, and low self-esteem.
- 5) Family, community and cultural elements of the social ecology should receive more attention in the study of risk and protective factors, to complement the attention paid to individual factors.
- 6) Outcomes should be expanded beyond symptomatology to include the full taxonomy of domains, including social, physical, spiritual, and psychological measures of well-being.
- 7) A greater focus on malleable protective factors has potential to advance prevention and intervention.

*Note:* These points are further elaborated in the text.

victimization that are concentrated later in life, such as financial exploitation of elders (Black, Basile, & Breiding, 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The National Elder Mistreatment Study is an important source of information on elder abuse, but, like many other national victimization surveys, it adopts a largely “siloe” approach to assessing victimization, primarily focusing on individual types of maltreatment and paying less attention to the intersections among them (Acierno et al., 2010). Furthermore, as shown in the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) with children, and in the Life Paths study for adults, a major and yet under-appreciated source of victimization burden is exposures that are witnessed or happen to loved ones (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013; Hamby, Weber, Grych, & Banyard, 2016). As far as we are aware, no study to date has explored the impact on elders of violence experienced by their caregivers, children, grandchildren, and other family members. Research has shown these experiences can be impactful for younger adults and youth, and elders are likely to be similarly affected. Indeed, a signature finding of poly-victimization research has been that, contrary to stereotypes, the impact of witnessing violence or seeing a loved one harmed is no less than experiencing a direct victimization. For some outcomes, it can even be higher. For example, NatSCEV data show that exposure to domestic violence is one of the most frightening forms of victimization a child can experience, more frightening even than being directly abused (Hamby & Turner, 2013). The concept of indirect victimization is especially relevant when considering poly-victimization occurring at multiple levels of the social ecology, including those in the social networks surrounding elders. Similar to the predicament facing some children, if an elder’s caregiver, upon whom they are dependent, is abused, the abuse can threaten their own well-being and the overall stability of their living situation, as much as—or perhaps even more than—direct abuse. More specifically to late life, there are new roles and responsibilities, such as grandparent or mentor, and the unique elements of indirect exposure to victimization in late life are largely unexplored.

This literature review seeks to summarize our current understanding of elder abuse, particularly risk and protective factors, as well as the role of poly-victimization and revictimization in elder abuse research. Furthermore, this review offers suggestions for future studies in order to truly understand the cumulative burden of elder victimization, as well as potential targets for prevention and intervention based on identified risk and protective factors. Finally, this review suggests future directions to advance the state of knowledge in elder abuse research, specifically the development of a comprehensive elder victimization questionnaire and a taxonomy of outcomes.

## Existing state of knowledge on elder abuse

Understanding vulnerability to victimization later in life has always been important, but perhaps it has become more so due to the increasing life expectancy in the U.S. and many other countries. About 13% of the current U.S. population is aged 65 or older, and this is expected to increase to 16.8% by 2020 (Morgan & Mason, 2014). Late life can introduce a unique set of vulnerabilities to victimization, and existing data clearly indicate that elder abuse is a major and challenging public health problem. Most research on elder mistreatment (also called “elder abuse” and “elder maltreatment”) focuses on five types: physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation (Pillemer, Connolly, Breackman, Spreng, & Lachs, 2015). The first large-scale national survey on elder abuse produced a rate of 32 per 1,000 and identified spouses as the primary perpetrators (Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988).

More recently, a systematic review of elder abuse studies reported produced higher estimates of 6% abused in the last month, and 5.6% of couples reported inter-partner violence (IPV) in the last year (Cooper, Selwood, & Livingston, 2008). In their review, rates were even higher for elders who were dependent on caregivers, with approximately one in four reporting psychological abuse, and approximately one in five reporting neglect. Disclosure by caregivers was also high, especially when emotional abuse was included, with approximately one in three family caregivers and one in six professional caregivers reporting emotional or other abuse of an elder. As is typical with all other forms of violence, self-report rates in surveys are much higher than official reports to police or adult protection agencies, showing the crucial role of community-based surveillance to monitor the true extent of this important public health problem that is becoming increasingly important as the U.S. population ages (Cooper et al., 2008).

The most recent large-scale nationally representative U.S. survey, the National Elder Mistreatment Study, found similar rates to those above and, unfortunately, no evidence of improvement in the more than two decades since we began monitoring elder abuse (Acierno et al., 2010). In this community sample of over 5,000 elders, the 1-year prevalence rate for emotional abuse was 4.6%, 1.6% for physical abuse, and 5.2% for current financial abuse by a family member. In total, 1 in 10 respondents reported some form of maltreatment in the past year. In recent years, other countries have also conducted prevalence studies, confirming that this is a widespread phenomenon (Biggs, Manthorpe, Tinker, Doyle, & Erens, 2009; Chokkanathan & Lee, 2005; Dong, Simon, & Gorbien, 2007; Gil et al., 2014; Lowenstein, Eiskovits, Band-Winerstein, & Enosh, 2009). A recent international review found rates ranging from 13.5% to 44.6% (Sooryanarayana, Choo, & Hairi, 2013). In that review, physical abuse was least common, and psychological abuse and financial exploitation were most common.

These studies and other prior research have established the importance of several measurement features. For example, it is important to explore a wide range of perpetrators in order to improve estimates of elder abuse (Comijs, Pot, Smit, Bouter, & Jonker, 1998; Cooper et al., 2008). Prior research has also established the importance of assessing forms of abuse that are specific to late life. Financial exploitation has probably received the most attention of these (Comijs et al., 1998; Naughton et al., 2012; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). However, with rapidly changing technology comes the need to fully explore all of the ways that elders can be financially exploited. For example, some recent research has focused on telemarketing scams, but the Internet is increasingly the focus of financial scams and identity theft attempts (James, Boyle, & Bennett, 2014). These forms of victimization are understudied even in the poly-victimization literature but may be especially important for understanding the burden of elder victimization.

These rates also suggest that late life is a period of particular vulnerability. Estimates of 1 in 10 for some forms of maltreatment are similar to current estimates of the rates of child maltreatment in the U.S., according to our National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) (Finkelhor et al., 2013, 2009). However, NatSCEV also shows that traditional definitions of maltreatment only capture a fraction of the true burden of victimization to which youth are exposed. Emerging data are beginning to show that this is also true for older adults—the traditional focus on family violence in much victimization research on adults only captures a portion of their victimization experiences (Hamby et al., 2016). It is our hypothesis that this is true for older adults as well, but as yet this has not been systematically investigated.

There is some limited research on differences among key sociodemographic subgroups. In terms of race and ethnicity, some data suggest that African Americans have the highest risk of elder abuse, followed by European Americans, with Latinos reporting the lowest rates (Beach, Schulz, Castle, & Rosen, 2010; Burnes et al., 2015; Dong, 2015; Laumann, Leitsch, & Waite, 2008; Pillemer, Burnes, Riffin, & Lachs, 2016). Women appear to experience higher rates of elder abuse than men (Pillemer et al., 2016; Yan & Brownell, 2015), particularly emotional (Laumann et al., 2008) and financial abuse (Lowenstein et al., 2009).

### **Other types of victimization against elders**

Most attention to victimizations experienced by elders has focused on maltreatment of the sort that would fall under the responsibility of Adult Protective Services (Pillemer et al., 2015). As noted above, with the exception of financial exploitation, the other four major forms parallel the types of incidents that are of concern to child protective service agencies: caregiver physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect. Because of mandatory reporting and other

legal obligations associated with these offenses, it is natural that they would receive particular attention (Finkelhor & Pillemer, 1988; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988). However, the poly-victimization framework and other models of cumulative risk have indicated that these are not, as they are often traditionally conceived, separate phenomena from other forms of victimization, and ensuring the safety of elders requires understanding the total burden of elder victimization.

Although more limited than data on caregiver-perpetrated maltreatment, other data show that elders experience a wider range of victimizations. The National Criminal Victimization Survey (NCVS) provides information about crime experienced by older adults. A recent analysis of a decade of NCVS data indicates that property crimes are one of the most common victimizations that elders experience, with rates higher than some estimates for maltreatment, at approximately 7% yearly incidence (Morgan & Mason, 2014). These data also show that property crime makes up a higher proportion of victimization against elders compared to younger adults. About 5% of older adults experience identity theft, which is higher than for some other adults (Morgan & Mason, 2014). Although the risk of some types of violent crime are lower for older adults than for others, assault and other victimizations occur throughout the lifespan (Morgan & Mason, 2014). All victimizations add to an elder's accumulation of lifetime adversities and victimizations, both direct and indirect.

Some research has documented the existence of other forms of victimization that would benefit from further study. One study found that some sexual predators target older adults, especially vulnerable, institutionalized persons (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, Teaster, Mendiondo, Marcum, & Abner, 2008). A recent study found 0.9% of older adults experienced a sexual victimization in the past year (Cannell, Manini, Spence-Almaguer, Maldonado-Molina, & Andresen, 2014). Case study evidence suggests that elders with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identities can be vulnerable to abuse related to their sexual orientation (Cook-Daniels, 1998). Although many measures of financial exploitation include exploitation by strangers, a recent study specifically focused on susceptibility to telemarketing scams and found vulnerability was associated with age, income, cognitive status, subjective well-being, social support, and literacy (James et al., 2014). Some recent conceptual and case study work has raised the issue of bullying among older adults, and a large literature has emerged on adult bullying in workplaces and other settings (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Snyder, 2012). These data suggest that peer victimization does not end in childhood and continues to impact well-being throughout the life span.

A neglected area of research is the impact of the victimization experiences of younger family members on older adults. It is well-established that exposure to the victimization of loved ones affects children and younger adults (Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005; Finkelhor et al., 2009; Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2010; Radford et al., 2013).



Anecdotally, it appears that one source of distress for many older adults is worrying about their children and grandchildren, but the effects of witnessing and indirect victimization on older adults appear to be unexplored.

### **The poly-victimization framework**

Victimization research, across the lifespan, has developed in a relatively “siloe” fashion—isolated into specialized areas (Hamby & Grych, 2013). This has been true of violence research in every developmental stage. For example, for youth, there are largely separate fields of study for child abuse, bullying, and teen dating violence, and even these have been subdivided further, for example into different types of bullying (such as relational, physical, and cyber). Similarly, in adulthood, the study of violence has developed into relatively independent fields of study, including but not limited to IPV, sexual assault, and conventional crime. Measurement for many years paralleled these siloes, with separate questionnaires for child abuse, bullying, IPV, sexual assault, and so on, with no single questionnaire that captured an individual’s true, total burden of victimization exposure.

In recent years, one of the most important lines of research that has emerged is that of poly-victimization, or cumulative victimization burden. Several different lines of research, including research using the poly-victimization framework, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and complex trauma, have shown that the cumulative victimization burden is a powerful correlate of mental and physical health symptoms (Cook et al., 2003; Finkelhor et al., 2007, 2011; Turner et al., 2010). For children and increasingly for young and middle adults as well, it is now well-established that studies that only examine a single victimization or adversity appear to be mis-specifying the source of distress and are failing to adequately capture the true phenomenon of victimization (Cuevas et al., 2010; Finkelhor et al., 2007, 2011; Radford et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2010). Surprisingly, even what are typically thought of as the most extreme forms of victimization, such as caregiver maltreatment, sexual victimization, or IPV, are less important predictors of current mental or physical health symptoms than the total number of victimizations (poly-victimization score or ACE score). Despite the surprising nature of this finding, it has now been confirmed in three separate, nationally representative studies of youth conducted by our team and replicated in other studies (Cuevas et al., 2010; Finkelhor et al., 2007; Radford et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2010). This focus on cumulative burden is now one of the fastest growing research areas in violence scholarship and one of the most influential conceptual frameworks to be introduced in recent years (Hamby, McDonald, & Grych, 2014).

However, although some of the research on cumulative victimization burden, such as the seminal ACE studies, were conducted with older adults,



these focused on childhood adversities only. The literature suggests that no prior research has assessed current patterns of poly-victimization among older adults (Felitti et al., 1998). There have also been calls for a more theoretically informed and less piecemeal approach to the study of elder abuse (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013; National Institute of Justice, 2014). The poly-victimization framework is uniquely well-suited to filling many gaps in the elder mistreatment literature. As was the case for youth victimization, lack of an appropriate and comprehensive measure of elder victimization has been an obstacle to extending this important new conceptual framework into late adulthood. Indeed, it has recently been noted that no gold standard measurement tool for elder abuse exists, particularly one that captures the full range of victimizations and their interconnections that elders may experience (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Sooryanarayana et al., 2013). Pillemer and colleagues have further noted the dearth of reliable and valid indicators of risk and protective factors (Lachs & Pillemer, 2004; Pillemer et al., 2011, 2016, 2015). Recent conceptual work on poly-victimization has focused on the mechanisms of co-occurrence and on identifying key risk and protective factors for prevention and intervention that can also be extended to late adulthood (Grych, Hamby, & Banyard, 2015; Hamby, Roberts, Taylor, Hagler, & Kaczkowski, *in press*).

### **Poly-victimization: The evidence in older adult samples**

Although limited, some elder abuse research has been conducted that is relevant to the poly-victimization and web of violence framework. A recent survey found that 75% of Adult Protective Services (APS) professionals identify poly-victimization as a significant problem, affecting an estimated one in four elders in their caseloads (Acierno et al., 2010). One case review found psychological abuse and neglect typically co-occurred with other forms of abuse (Acierno et al., 2010). The National Elder Mistreatment Study found that a prior history of trauma was connected to late-life vulnerability to abuse (Acierno et al., 2010). (Note this study also produced a total incident rate, but this is not the same as exploring interconnections among different types of abuse or creating a poly-victimization or ACE-style score that counts all the different forms of abuse that an individual has experienced.) The link between early and later revictimization corresponds to a large literature on patterns of revictimization in other research on elder abuse and in other populations (Barnes, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2009; Hamby & Grych, 2013; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). As with other consequences, prior work suggests that poly-victimization is one of the strongest predictors of later revictimization (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014).

One important study of co-occurrence across types of elder abuse was conducted by Jackson and Hafemeister (2012). They compared financial

exploitation alone to financial exploitation that co-occurred with another type of abuse. The “hybrid” combined type was found to be more serious in several respects, including poorer outcomes, longer duration, and greater victim fear. Victims of multiple forms of abuse were less physically healthy and more likely to be abused by a household member. These findings are consistent with the poly-victimization framework and provide some preliminary evidence of the potential for a focus on co-occurrence to better understand differences in risks and outcomes among vulnerable elders.

## **Risk and protective factors for elder abuse**

The study of risk and protective factors for elder abuse is growing but is still under-developed compared to research on rates of victimization. Existing research has largely focused on risk factors—the presence of vulnerabilities or problems that increase the chances of elder abuse. Some risk markers are specific to late life: increased frailty, ageism, and loss of social roles through retirement, for example, can create vulnerabilities (Finkelhor & Pillemer, 1988). Some commonly identified risk factors include age (being older even within the group of elders), race (membership in disadvantaged group relative to country of residence), poverty, low educational achievement, low income, and prior trauma history (Acierno et al., 2010; Choi, Kulick, & Mayer, 1999; Dong et al., 2007; Garre-Olmo et al., 2009; Gil et al., 2014; Lacher, Wettstein, Senn, Rosemann, & Hasler, 2016; Lachs, Williams, O’Brien, Hurst, & Horwitz, 1997; Post et al., 2010). Numerous physical and health problems also place elders at greater risk, including low self-esteem, functional disability, cognitive impairment, behavior problems, mental health problems, dependency in activities of daily living, and poor physical health or frailty (Begle et al., 2011; Dong, 2015; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013; Lacher et al., 2016).

Notably for the poly-victimization framework, existing research suggests that many of these risk factors are similar across different types of elder abuse (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013; Post et al., 2010). This has also been shown to be the case for violence in younger populations—there are many commonalities across risk factors, and a more integrated approach to the study of risk and protective factors holds considerable potential to advance the field of elder abuse (Hamby & Grych, 2013). However, it is equally important to note that there may be differences in risk factors for some types of maltreatment. For example, one study found neglect was especially associated with cohabiting with a caregiver, and hybrid financial exploitation was especially associated with mutual dependency (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2014). A poly-victimization framework is particularly well-suited for systematically identifying unique and common risk factors.

### ***Other elements of the social ecology***

As can be seen by the above list, many of the most commonly studied risk factors are at the individual level of the “social ecology,” that is, they are characteristics of the elders themselves. However, other elements of the social ecology affect elders, too. In Bronfenbrenner’s seminal work (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), these elements were labeled microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem, but to be more comparable to other work, we refer to these aspects as family, social, and cultural elements of the social ecology. Influential research has pointed to the vulnerabilities created when family members and caregivers have their own mental health or financial problems (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013; Lowenstein et al., 2009; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1989). Many perpetrators of elder abuse are family members, and given the mutual dependency, cohabitation, and bonds of trust, this can make it more complex than some acts of stranger-perpetrated crime (Finkelhor & Pillemer, 1988). Caregiver burden or stress and family conflict have also received considerable attention and some empirical support (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). However, recent work has questioned the primacy of the caregiver stress model (Anetzberger, 2000; Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013). At this point, it seems clear that early models that suggested that caregiver stress was the primary cause of elder abuse were overly simplistic (Anetzberger, 2000; Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013). Nonetheless, the identification of this issue still serves as an early exemplar of the importance of the immediate family and social network, important elements of the social ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). More recently, one of the most promising protective factors that has been examined in the elder abuse literature is social support (Acierno et al., 2010; Chokkanathan & Lee, 2005; Garre-Olmo et al., 2009; Turner, Pearlin, & Mullan, 1998).

Unfortunately, as is true of most psychological research on violence and other topics, family, community, and cultural aspects of the social ecology have received much less study than individual risk and protective factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). In some respects, because of the prominent role of caregivers in elders’ well-being, the elder abuse literature has paid more attention to this than some other violence subdisciplines, as indicated by the literature on caregiver burden and social support (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). However, other aspects of the social ecology have received very little attention. This would also be an important place to consider whether race, ethnicity, gender, or other personal characteristics intersect with these other factors, but even less attention has been paid to subgroup differences in risk and protective factors or the influence of health disparities on vulnerability to victimization. The importance of caregivers and social support suggests the potential for advancing our understanding of elder abuse by expanding the study of the outer layer of the social ecology.

## Shifting from a deficit to a strengths lens

Existing research is limited in two important ways. One, most of the risk factors that have been studied are static factors, such as age, race, previous victimization history, and cognitive impairment, that are difficult if not impossible to change (Burnes, Pillemer, & Lachs, 2016; Dong, 2015). Although these need to be recognized and addressed, many of these are not likely in and of themselves to become targets for prevention and intervention. Two, there has been a dearth of research on protective factors, or strengths, that might insulate elders from victimization or help them achieve resilience when victimization does occur (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013). A recent review of theoretical formulations for elder abuse has also called for an approach that examines both risk and protection and includes not only the victim, but also characteristics of the perpetrator and elements of the social ecology (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013). There are several promising candidates for more malleable protective factors. For example, a sense of mastery has been shown to be important for successful aging (Schieman & Turner, 1998). Social support and other nonindividual factors are also important protective factors.

Using a theoretical framework called the Resilience Portfolio Model, we have identified the most important malleable correlates of well-being after adversity in three key domains: regulatory strengths, interpersonal strengths, and meaning-making strengths (Grych et al., 2015; Hamby et al., *in press*). Our recent study of more than 2,500 adults and adolescents included more than 20 potential protective and risk factors. Within each of these domains, some strengths were better predictors of multiple dimensions of well-being than others (Banyard, Hamby, & Grych, 2016; Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2016). Among regulatory strengths, these included: emotional regulation, emotional awareness, and endurance. Among meaning making, the most promising strengths were: purpose, optimism, and religious meaning making; and among interpersonal strengths: compassion, generativity, and community support. Several of these strengths, such as emotional regulation, optimism, and religious meaning making, peaked among the older adults in our study (generally 40 to 60 years of age).

## A taxonomy of outcomes

Psychological symptoms have received the most study, and all types of abuse have generally been found to be associated with increased psychological distress, such as increased depressive or anxiety symptoms (Chokkanathan & Lee, 2005; Cisler, Begle, Amstadter, & Acierno, 2012; Dong et al., 2007; Fulmer, Rodgers, & Pelger, 2014). Some research has suggested that emotional abuse is most strongly associated with psychological distress, paralleling literature on

other forms of violence, such as IPV (Cisler et al., 2012). Other outcomes that have been studied include role limitations, life satisfaction, and other aspects of quality of life (Chokkanathan & Lee, 2005; Fulmer et al., 2014). In the elder abuse field, it is clear from existing work that financial well-being is an important outcome to consider (Pillemer et al., 2015). In our own work, we have recently included spiritual well-being as an outcome measure. Religiosity increases with age, and this has been a neglected area in violence research. The positive psychology literature has included an extensive focus on subjective well-being and quality of life, and this has been reflected in some work on elder abuse as well. Another outcome of increasing attention in the broader violence literature is post-traumatic growth. However, this appears to have received only limited investigation in older adults (Park, Mills-Baxter, & Fenster, 2005). Finally, a new outcome area that emerged from the qualitative portion of our last project was family well-being, and the extent to which a person's well-being is determined by the status of their family members. This could be a potentially important new outcome for understanding elder functioning and resilience.

## Implications

Foremost, future research should explore and identify the full range of victimizations experienced by elders, including witnessed and indirect victimization, as well as property crimes and financial exploitation. This would require a specific measure to identify and assess rates and patterns of poly-victimization among elders, in hopes of better capturing the lifespan burden of victimizations and their subsequent impact on elders. We also need better tools to assess associated risk and protective factors. Research should consider and identify the types of child and young adult victimizations most often associated with elder abuse in order to further understand the interconnections between victimizations. Future research should also seek to increase the number of measured outcomes relevant for this population, beyond mental health symptoms and physical health, to include subjective well-being, family well-being, and spiritual well-being. Capturing the range of elder victimizations, as well as multiple and diverse outcomes, will best help researchers establish a taxonomy of elder abuse that is currently absent in the literature. This will help better define the unique elements of elder victimization and those that are shared with other forms of victimization. More attention also needs to be paid to health disparities, and especially whether risks or protective factors vary across key subgroups.

In addition to identifying rates and patterns of poly-victimization, future research should identify risk and protective factors that can ameliorate the effects of victimization and reduce the likelihood of victimization, in order to determine the best targets for intervention and prevention. The field has some

key pieces of information on factors creating vulnerabilities to elder abuse, such as cognitive impairment and low socioeconomic status. However, prevention and intervention would be better served by a shift to more malleable factors, across all aspects of the social ecology, and a focus on building strengths to reduce risk and increase well-being (Burnes et al., 2015; Dong, 2015; Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). The Resilience Portfolio Model offers one framework for comprehensively assessing protective factors. We also need to know more about whether some groups respond differently to programs than others, or how to best adapt programs for different social and cultural groups.

A recent White House Conference on Aging included calls to better recognize elder abuse as a major public health problem (Pillemer et al., 2015). Information is needed to help improve training, increase screening and awareness of elder victimization, and enhance current prevention and intervention efforts, as well as develop new ones. Greater attention to poly-victimization and protective factors can promote the safety and well-being of older adults and increase the effectiveness of prevention and intervention strategies. Clinical services should increase screening for elder poly-victimization, and greater awareness of the total burden of victimization can inform prevention and intervention efforts. Existing research supports the focus on multiple layers of the social ecology and identifying strengths in efforts to ameliorate the effects of the lifetime cumulative burden of victimization on elders.

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