

The nature of elder mistreatment in South Korea and implications to improve policy and practice: A qualitative secondary analysis

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To qualitatively explore elder mistreatment occurring within families of South Korea, this study was based on a data set collected during a 1-year period in South Korea through cooperation with the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare and Korean Elder Protection Agency. For this qualitative secondary analysis, 49 case narratives that met the inclusion criteria were collected from the original data set. The criteria for data collection included: elders aged 65 years or older who were mistreated and who consented to share their stories, abuse by family members, emergency cases, no impairment is evident, and termination of intervention.

Based on the existing literature and theories, a comprehensive conceptual framework was developed for better understanding elder mistreatment in families as well as for developing effective, contextually-sensitive intervention and prevention strategies. The conceptual framework has four dimensions: risk factors of elder mistreatment, the nature of violence, the effects on victims, and the victims' responses to elder mistreatment. Particularly, to identify risk factors of elder mistreatment, this study was guided by the ecological perspective.

The qualitative secondary analysis revealed the following themes: causes of elder mistreatment, characteristics of violence, damaged personal functioning, broken family relationships, reaction to elder mistreatment, positive perception of public services, dependence upon public support, the changing socioeconomic situation, family responsibility, and the ethical dilemmas. In sum, elder mistreatment was associated with not only the characteristics of individuals and families, but also the complicated interactions between individuals and the environments that affect individuals and families.

Findings from this study will be useful for giving the practitioners, researchers, policy-makers, and other readers an in-depth understanding of elder mistreatment. Particularly, practitioners, such as social workers, health care providers, and social service providers are in a unique position to have contact with vulnerable elderly and identify whether or not there is violence. Thus, they need to be aware of the nature of elder mistreatment and the diverse contexts surrounding elder mistreatment. This study is also valuable for generating hypotheses and identifying critical areas related to elder mistreatment. Implications for policy, practice, and future research are thoroughly discussed.