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# Elder abuse in New Zealand: Social risk factors

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## ABSTRACT

Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person. Elder abuse has been linked to significant morbidity and mortality and is receiving increasing attention from policymakers and health professionals. The research literature has identified various factors as correlates of elder abuse. Given the strength of evidence for loneliness and lack of social support as correlates of elder abuse, the present study aimed to examine these factors as well as a related concept, social network type, in the New Zealand context. Data was analysed from the 2010 and 2012 waves of the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NZLSA) which focused on health and ageing indicators such ( $N = 3277$  in 2010;  $N = 3212$  in 2012). Cross-sectionally, the focus of this study was whether loneliness, social support and social network type predicted elder abuse. Longitudinally, I explored whether the same three variables predicted later elder abuse at two-year follow-up. Multiple regression, moderation and mediation analyses were primarily applied. Elder abuse was found to be related to poorer physical and mental health outcomes both at baseline and two years later. Loneliness and social support were both related to elder abuse, with loneliness also related to elder abuse two years later. Social network type was not related to elder abuse. Social support had a moderating effect on the relationship between elder abuse and loneliness as well as a partially mediating effect on the relationship between elder abuse and mental health. Loneliness partially mediated the relationships between elder abuse and lower physical health, lower mental health and increased age. Most of these moderating and mediating effects were significant both at baseline and two years later. Potential limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed. These findings are intended to provide supporting evidence that loneliness and social support are key factors to consider as correlates of elder abuse, and to

inform health professionals, researchers and older adults about social lifestyle choices likely to reduce risk of elder abuse.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xiv
List of Appendices	xvi
Chapter 1. What is Elder Abuse?	1
1.1 Definition of Elder Abuse	1
1.2 Definition of ‘Older People’	3
1.3 Definition of ‘Act or Lack of Appropriate Action’ and ‘Harm or Distress’	4
1.4 Definition of ‘Relationship of Trust’	9
1.5 Cultural Considerations	10
Māori	10
Pacific	11
Other ethnic communities	12
Other considerations	13
Summary	13
1.6 Anthropological View of Ageing	14
Prehistorical times	14
Egyptian civilisation	15
Greek civilisation	15
Hebrew civilisation	15
Roman civilisation	15

Middle Ages	15
The Renaissance	16
Early modern period	16
Current society	16
Summary	17
1.7 Summary	18
Chapter 2. Prevalence and Consequences of Elder Abuse	20
2.1 Prevalence Statistics	20
2.2 Implications of Elder Abuse	22
Health	22
Social Justice/Legal	22
2.3 Ageing Population	23
2.4 Promotion of the Rights of Older People	24
2.5 Working towards a Solution to the Problem of Underreporting	26
Underreporting	26
Fear	26
Shame	26
Nobody to disclose to	26
Lack of knowledge about the law or helpful agencies	26
Mistrust of agencies	27
Reducing Reliance on Reporting	27
Paternalistic Mandatory Reporting Policies	27
Screening Tools	28
2.6 Summary	29
Chapter 3. Causes of Elder Abuse	31

3.1 Theories of Elder Abuse	31
Stressed Caregiver	31
Psychopathology	32
Dependency	32
Life Course	33
Ecological	33
Individual victim	35
Age	35
Gender	36
Socioeconomic status	36
Health	37
Individual perpetrator	37
Relationship	37
Community	38
Social support	38
Social networks	44
Loneliness	47
Societal	50
Ageism	50
Cultural norms of violence	52
Economic and social factors	52
Community dynamics	52
3.2 Theoretical Elements from Research of Abuse of other Vulnerable Groups	53
Child Abuse	54
Intimate Partner Violence	54

Contagion/Public Health	54
Social Organisation/Social Sciences	54
3.3 Summary	55
Chapter 4. Summary and Gaps in the Research	57
Chapter 5. The Present Study	63
5.1 Aims	63
5.2 Research Questions	64
5.3 Hypotheses	64
Chapter 6. Method	67
6.1 Overview of the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NZLSA)	67
6.2 Participants	68
6.3 Procedure	71
6.4 Design	73
6.5 Measures	74
Variables	76
Age, Gender and Ethnicity	76
Economic living standards	76
Mental health	78
Physical health	79
Social support	79
Social network type	80
Loneliness	81
Elder abuse	82
6.6 Preliminary Data Screening	82
6.7 Statistical Analysis	84

Research Hypothesis 1	85
Research Hypothesis 2	85
Research Hypotheses 3-5	89
Research Hypotheses 6-9	90
Chapter 7. Developing the Elder Abuse measure	93
7.1 The Vulnerability to Abuse Screening Scale (VASS)	93
Internal reliability of the VASS	94
Validity of the VASS	95
Chapter 8. Results	102
8.1 Elder Abuse in the Sample	102
8.2 Hypotheses and Findings	103
Hypothesis 1	103
Hypothesis 2	108
Hypothesis 3	117
Hypotheses 4	119
Hypothesis 5	120
Hypothesis 6	122
Hypothesis 7	124
Hypothesis 8	128
Hypothesis 9	132
8.3 Summary of Significant Results	136
8.4 Binary Logistic Regression Results	137
Predicting Elder Abuse: Loneliness	138
Predicting Elder Abuse: Social Support	141
Predicting Elder Abuse: Family Dependent Social Network Type	144

Predicting Elder Abuse: Locally Integrated Social Network Type	147
Summary	150
Chapter 9. Discussion	151
9.1 Overview	151
9.2 Primary Findings	152
9.3 Limitations	158
Elder abuse experiences of ethnic minorities underrepresented	158
Institutionalised older adults	161
Problems with the VASS measure of elder abuse	162
Comment on effect size	166
9.4 Clinical Implications	166
9.5 Future Directions	169
9.6 Conclusions	171
References	175
Appendices	204

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Sample: Key Study Variables	70
Table 2. Description and Purpose of the Measures	75
Table 3. Internal reliability estimates for the VASS Subscales	94
Table 4. Factor Loadings, Factor Score Coefficients, Percentage of Variation and Internal Reliability Estimates from Sample 2010	96
Table 5. Factor Loadings, Factor Score Coefficients, Percentage of Variation and Internal Reliability Estimates from Sample 2012	97
Table 6. Vulnerability to Abuse Screening Scale Subscales from Schofield, Powers & Loxton, 2013	98
Table 7. Revised Subscales for Present Study	99
Table 8. Relationship of VASS Dejection subscale to measures of mental health	100
Table 9. Modified VASS for purposes of present study	101
Table 10. Endorsement of MVASS items	102
Table 11. Intercorrelations of MVASS10 and health measures	103
Table 12. Elder abuse predicting physical health outcomes at two year follow up, controlling for physical health at baseline	105
Table 13. Elder abuse predicting mental health outcomes at two year follow up, controlling for mental health at baseline	107

Table 14. Intercorrelations of Key Study Variables	109
Table 15. Loneliness predicting elder abuse at baseline and at two year follow up, controlling for age, economic living standards, physical health and mental health	111
Table 16. Social support predicting elder abuse at baseline and at two year follow up, controlling for age, economic living standards, physical health and mental health	113
Table 17. Family Dependent SNT predicting elder abuse at baseline and at two year follow up, controlling for age, economic living standards, physical health and mental health	115
Table 18. Locally Integrated SNT predicting elder abuse at baseline and at two year follow up, controlling for age, economic living standards, physical health and mental health	116
Table 19. Social support as a moderating variable on the relationship between loneliness and elder abuse	118
Table 20. Gender as a moderating variable on the relationship between loneliness and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	119
Table 21. Gender as a moderating variable on the relationship between social support and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	121
Table 22. Mental health as a mediating variable on the relationship between social support and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	123
Table 23. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between physical health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	125

Table 24. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between physical health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at two year follow up)	127
Table 25. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between mental health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	129
Table 26. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between mental health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at two year follow up)	131
Table 27. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between age and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	133
Table 28. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between age and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at two year follow up)	135
Table 29. Logistic Regression Analysis: Loneliness Predicting Elder Abuse at Baseline after Controlling for Age, Economic Living Standards, Physical Health and Mental Health	139
Table 30. Logistic Regression Analysis: Loneliness Predicting Elder Abuse at Two Year Follow Up after Controlling for Age, Economic Living Standards, Physical Health and Mental Health	140
Table 31. Logistic Regression Analysis: Social Support Predicting Elder Abuse at Baseline after Controls	142
Table 32. Logistic Regression Analysis: Social Support Predicting Elder Abuse at Two Year Follow Up after Controls	143
Table 33. Logistic Regression Analysis: Family Dependent SNT Predicting Elder Abuse at Baseline after Controls	145

Table 34. Logistic Regression Analysis: Family Dependent SNT Predicting Elder Abuse at Two Year Follow Up after Controls	146
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Table 35. Logistic Regression Analysis: Locally Integrated SNT Predicting Elder Abuse at Baseline after Controls	148
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Table 36. Logistic Regression Analysis: Locally Integrated SNT Predicting Elder Abuse at Two Year Follow Up after Controls	149
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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Ecological model of elder abuse	34
Figure 2. Simple mediation model	92
Figure 3. Social support as a moderating variable on the relationship between loneliness and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	118
Figure 4. Gender as a moderating variable on the relationship between loneliness and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	121
Figure 5. Mental health as a mediating variable on the relationship between social support and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	123
Figure 6. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between physical health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	125
Figure 7. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between physical health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at two year follow up)	127
Figure 8. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between mental health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	129
Figure 9. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between mental health and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at two year follow up)	131
Figure 10. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between age and elder abuse (elder abuse measured at baseline)	133

Figure 11. Loneliness as a mediating variable on the relationship between age and elder abuse  
(elder abuse measured at two year follow up)

135

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1. New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NZLSA) Survey 2010	204
Appendix 2. Research Case Study	230