

Chinese-Americans abused earlier in life face greater abuse risk as elders

May 20 2019

Chinese-Americans who were victims of child abuse or intimate partner violence are at a greater risk of abuse when they are elderly, according to a Rutgers study in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

The researchers surveyed 3,157 Chinese-American adults over age 60 and found that those who reported a history of child abuse were twice as likely to experience [domestic violence](#) in adult romantic relationships and elder abuse later on. Those who reported [intimate partner violence](#) as an adult were six times as likely to experience elder abuse. The findings suggest a cumulative effect of violence throughout the lifespan of Chinese-Americans.

"We know that victims of violence might be at a greater risk of being revictimized, but this has not been sufficiently studied in regard to elder abuse," said lead author XinQi Dong, director of the Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research. "This study suggests that [health care professionals](#) should be more aware of how abuse earlier in life can predispose one to more violence as this population ages."

According to the study, 15 percent of those over age 60 reported elder abuse, 11 percent reported violence by an intimate partner when they 18 to 59 years old and 7 percent reported abuse before the age of 18. The data included physical, psychological and [sexual abuse](#).

The participants were asked 10 questions related to elder abuse, such as if they were afraid of anyone in their family, if they felt no one wanted

them around and if anyone forced them to do things they did not want to do. To discover child or intimate partner abuse, the participants were asked about [physical harm](#), unwanted sexual contact and verbal abuse such as threats or insults.

While the researchers found an association between marriage and intimate partner violence, there was no significant connection between marital status and elder abuse. "This contrast might show that elder abuse does not predominantly involve a partner," said Dong. "It also reinforces a prior study, which found that Chinese older adults experienced elder abuse as part of inter-generational family conflicts."

The majority of people who reported child abuse or intimate partner violence experience were not from mainland China. Men reported a higher rate of child abuse, while women reported more intimate partner violence. People with higher levels of education reported elder abuse more. "This might be because people with higher education levels are more open to discussing [negative experiences](#) or that they seek mental health services more," Dong said.

According to Dong, [primary care physicians](#) do not adequately screen patients for violence across the lifespan.

Since the findings suggest a lasting effect of early victimization on older adults, health care professionals should screen more closely for [elder abuse](#) in patients with a known history of child or intimate partner abuse, he said.

More information: *JAMA Internal Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0313](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0313)

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: Chinese-Americans abused earlier in life face greater abuse risk as elders (2019, May 20) retrieved 31 January 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-chinese-americans-abused-earlier-life-greater.html>

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