

## Care of Elderly in Portugal: Official data and Scientific and Professional Challenges

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### Abstract

The world has never been so active in approaching human needs and human rights. As the population has become older, new kind of pressures has been made over health and protective services, as well as on research targeted to older adults. This chapter presents the scientific and practical developments in the field of elder mistreatment in Portugal. An overview of the scientific trends in Portuguese research is presented. National research on elder mistreatment has been increasing slowly. The current national scenery is focused on prevalence data and identifying risk and vulnerabilities. This chapter will also discuss the support structures available for mistreated older adults in Portugal, namely the current legal framework and the institutions/entities that offer aid to the victims. Legally, elder mistreatment in Portugal is no different from domestic violence, though some legislative advances have been seen in abandonment. Some structures have been developed over the years to offer aid to older adults, from special programs in the police to private institutions, passing by government supported initiatives.

*Keywords:* older adults, mistreatment, Portugal, research data, social services

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Currently, there has been an increase in the awareness of the necessity to promote and protect the well-being of the older adult community. The current demographic trends proportionated by the increase in longevity and the diminishing of births are expressing themselves in the increase of the mean age of the population of a number of countries and Portugal is no exception. The comparison between the nation-wide census carried on 2001 and 2011 showed that the population with 65 or more years represented 16% of the national population in 2001 and in 2011 represented 19% of the population (INE 2016). This trend has serious implications and the need to promote the welfare of older adults has never been higher.

The topic of older adults' mistreatment is central when addressing the welfare of older adults, for it is a representation of an attack to the older adult's welfare. This topic has been gaining increased attention in the past few years in our country, but there is still a long road ahead. In fact, the topic has been taking increased attention in the media. A search of the national online newspapers (keywords "older adults' mistreatment", in Portuguese "idosos, maus tratos") revealed that during 2014, 163 newspaper articles were published with these keywords while in 2015 this number increased to 422 articles. This increase in the media gives a good idea of the increasing social concern about older adults' mistreatment. The social demands for answers in this area are stimulating scientific research on the topic and the development of structures to answer to the needs of the population.

In this chapter we're going to expose the current approach Portugal is taking on the subject of older adults' mistreatment, how the subject is approached by scientific research and what forms of support exist, the legal support provided by the Portuguese legislation and the support given by private or governmental institutions.

### **Current Research Trends**

A brief search on the institutional databases (RCAAP) revealed the Portuguese trends on research in the older adults' mistreatment field. Three main topics emerge at first sight. There are prevalence studies, studies that try to validate screening measures for the detection of older adults' mistreatment and studies about the social representations of abuse. We're briefly going to summarize these main topics and the major results.

When approaching the research on older adults' mistreatment, prevalence studies are unavoidable. The research in this area in Portugal is fairly recent but some prevalence studies are mentionable. Before 2010, only 9 studies were conducted and were summarized in a review by Santos, Ferreira-Alves and Penhale (2011). Most of the studies were unpublished or were developed for monographic or master's thesis. These works generally had small samples and established the prevalence rates of abuse by recurring to screening measures (for more information about this studies consult Santos et al. 2011). The results of these studies varied widely and showed prevalence rates that ranged from 26.7% to 100%.

**ABUEL study.** Since 2010, 3 projects of considerable proportions took place in or included, Portugal in attempts to identify the prevalence rate of older adults' mistreatment. First, there was the ABUEL project (Soares et al. 2010), whose final report was released in 2010. This study focused on identifying the prevalence of 4 types of older adults' mistreatment (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, plus injuries) and its perpetrators. This project covered 7 urban centers in different European countries (Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). In Portugal, the data collections took place in the city of Porto, the second most populous in the country. Besides prevalence and the characteristics of the perpetrators, this study also looked for factors associated with abuse, like mental illness and quality of life. The data from Portugal was gathered from 656 participants. Data collections were performed by using either a face-to-face interview or a combination of interview and self-report questionnaires. To identify abuse the authors used the questionnaire adopted by O'Keeffe and collaborators (2007) in the UK study of abuse and neglect, and the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus 1979).

The general results indicated an overall prevalence of abuse of 27.3%, with the data from Portugal reaching a prevalence rate of 33.8%. In comparison with the other countries in the study, Portugal was the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest prevalence, just between Greece (35.3%) and Lithuania (33%). The more common form of abuse was psychological abuse with a prevalence of 19.4%, which was the leading form of abuse in all the countries in the study, and where the Portuguese data is congruent with the international tendencies, with a 21.9% prevalence rate for psychological abuse. It's worth mentioning that data from this study indicated that Portugal was leading the rates of financial abuse, with 7.8%, followed by Spain with 4.8%. The authors acknowledge some limitations of this study, namely the specific focus on the urban population and a high rate of refusals to participate

(response rate of 45.2%). This study provided a first look at how Portugal fits in the European panorama of older adults' mistreatment and was probably at the time the study that better represented the Portuguese population.

**AVOW study.** One year later, in 2011, the report of the AVOW project was released (Luoma et al. 2011). This was the second European study where Portugal took part and showed more worrying results. The AVOW project was developed in 5 European countries, namely Austria, Belgium, Finland, Lithuania, and Portugal, and took a more restrict population than the ABUEL project, by studying only older women. The assessment of older adults' mistreatment was made recurring to a standardized questionnaire whose items were either created for this specific purpose or adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus 1979). Overall, the questionnaire searched for 6 types of older adults' mistreatment, namely emotional abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, violation of personal rights and neglect. If abuse was identified, the participants were asked to answer some questions about the perpetrator. Like the ABUEL study, the data collection was made by recurring to face-to-face interviews or by mailing the questionnaire to the participants. The adopted strategy varied from country to country, some countries adopting the face-to-face interviews (Lithuania) or telephone interviews (Austria), others mailing the questionnaire only (Finland, Portugal), or a mix of both methods (Belgium). In the specific case of Portugal, the final number of participants was 649, considering a response rate of 40.9%. The results indicated an overall prevalence of abuse of 28.1%, with Portugal on the top with a prevalence rate of 39.4%. On the specific types of abuse, the results were congruent with the ABUEL study, with emotional abuse being the most common. However, in the AVOW study, the Portuguese sample was on top of every type of abuse, except physical and sexual. Unlike the previous study, the AVOW study paints a darker picture of the Portuguese scenario on the violence against older adults. Although comparisons between studies are always flawed due to differences in measurements the differences between the two studies here presented are not easy to explain. It seems unlikely that in the span of a year there was an increase of 5.6 % in the Portuguese prevalence of abuse, so these results must be interpreted carefully. First, the AVOW study considered only abuse in older women, while the ABUEL considered also men, which can account for an increase in the prevalence since women are more likely to be victimized (Ferreira-Alves and Sousa 2005). Second, the differences in the data collection methodology may have a role in the differences found as the lack of contact with the researcher in the AVOW study can grant a different perception of anonymity.

And third, the AVOW study included participants from rural settings, while the ABUEL focused on the urban dwellers, which may also explain some of the variances.

**Aging and violence study.** A third prevalence study was conducted in Portugal, this time focusing only in this country. The project “Aging and Violence”(Gil et al. 2014) collected data from 1123 participants from 7 geographical regions that were later pondered by the number of older adults living in the respective region. The data collection method adopted was the telephonic interview, where an interview was applied to characterize sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and abuse. Overall, the authors found a prevalence of older adults’ mistreatment of 15%, when considering strangers as the perpetrator, and 12.3%, when excluding acts committed by strangers. Unlike the previous studies, where psychological/emotional abuse was isolated on the top of prevalence rates, in the “Aging and Violence” study, psychological abuse shares equal footing with financial abuse, tied as the most prevalent types of abuse, with a prevalence of 6.3%. Considering the previous data, these results are surprising. Though an increase in the prevalence of financial abuse is understandable when looking at the current economic scenario in Portugal, the differences in the prevalence are very sharp. Although the “Aging and Violence” study had a considerable sample size, of the total of phone calls generated, only 20.4% were picked up and only 73% of them were eligible for the study. This might be a factor to take into consideration when looking to this results.

The 3 studies presented are the most extensive prevalence studies carried on in Portugal. Some considerations can be extracted from the results of the three studies. First, if we take into account the regularities found in the three studies it seems clear that older adults’ mistreatment has relevant a prevalence in Portugal though the full extent of the problem is neither consensual nor clear. Second, emotional/psychological abuse is consistently on the top of the abuse charts. This is a good indication where specific prevention programs of older adults’ mistreatment could start. Given the extent of psychological abuse, adopting preventive interventions for it could contribute to a significant reduction of the overall problem. Third, Portugal seems to be experiencing higher rates of financial abuse than other countries. Though in the last years an increase in the rates of financial abuse could be taken as a reflection of the harsh economic situation the country has been experiencing, the rates of financial abuse are constantly higher than in other countries. It is possible that the measurements used in research do not take into consideration specific cultural peculiarities and considers them abusive.

**Research measures of older adults' mistreatment.** But prevalence studies are not everything going on in the Portuguese exploration of older adults' mistreatment. The existence of older adults' mistreatment, as shown in the prevalence studies, creates a great demand for screening measures, but surprisingly, in the past few years there have been not that many studies of validation of screening measures to the Portuguese population as would be expected. In fact, few measures are adapted and then used systematically. Two of the more popular ones are the QEEA (Questions to Elicit Elder Abuse; Carney, Kahan, and Paris 2003) and the CASE (Caregiver Abuse Screen; Reis and Nahmiash 1995). QEEA has been the measure of choice in research on older adults' mistreatment in Portugal (Santos, Ferreira-Alves and Penhale 2011). The QEEA was partially validated by Ferreira-Alves and Sousa (2003), with a reduced sample size that did not allow to have a clear picture of the internal consistency of the measure, nor had access to measures of external validity. In fact, Ferreira-Alves and Sousa's (2005) study counted with 82 participants, later expanded to 104 (Ferreira-Alves, Sousa, Daly and Jogerst 2005), selected from day-care centres from the city of Braga, and found that 73.1% of the studied population presented, at least, one indicator of abuse. This is a concerning result, because on the one hand, one indicator is enough to raise suspicions of older adults' mistreatment and lead to further assessment (Carney, Kahan, and Paris 2003), on the other hand, such a high frequency of the presence of one indicator is a signal that this criterion for further assessment might not be adequate and might need a reformulation. There is no way, however, to compare this data, since the original intention of this measure was to be used as a clinical aid, and its author did not explore the psychometric properties of the scale. However, the Portuguese version of the measure observed a good internal consistency, indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of .83. The QEEA is the more frequently used measure on older adults' mistreatment research in Portugal.

Although research with caregivers is scarcer, when it is the case the more commonly used measure is the Caregiver Abuse Screen (Reis and Nahmiash 1995). This measure was translated and validated by Afonso, Ferreira-Alves, Daly and Martín (2009, as cited in Santos et al. 2011) and although the validation data were not published, subsequent studies have found that the measure had a questionable internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha of .65 (Santos, Ferreira-Alves, and Penhale 2011). Other measures have been validated, mainly as part of the development of masters dissertations or other academic studies, like the IDANHQ (Daly and Jogerst 2005), VASS (Schofield and Mishra 2003) and EAI (Fulmer, Street, and Carr 1984). Other measures have been

translated and await normative data to be used by professionals in different fields (e.g. the Elder Abuse Suspicion Index; Yaffe, Wolfson, Lithwick, and Weiss 2008).

The reduced number of screening measures validated to our population is not entirely surprising. Since the exploration of the field is fairly recent, is not surprising that the main concern has been with establishing estimations of the dimensions of the problem and not with validating or developing ways to measure it. Likewise, the studies of prevalence and the attempts to validate measures are taken as opportunities to study the distribution of the events that constitute those the measures in order to get an idea of how those events are represented in our population. Like in other countries, some obstacles pose themselves to the validation and development of reliable measures of elder abuse. First, the absence of highly reliable measures to pose as gold standard makes it difficult to get measures of concurrent validity. Second, as in Portugal, older adults' mistreatment legally is understood as domestic violence, as we'll explore ahead, and the reported cases are usually the extreme ones, it is difficult to explore indicators of older adults' mistreatment from already known cases. It's, therefore, not surprising that the mentioned measurements are not common use in the applied fields, like in general medicine or in the social services.

**Older adults' representation of abuse.** Beyond older adult perceptions of abuse and caregivers' acknowledgment of specific behaviors suggestive of abuse toward older adults, there is also one more focus in Portuguese research that is related to the explorations of the social representations of older adults about abuse. The perception of the older adult about how abusive the behavior of others can be perceived seems rarely taken into consideration in the screening and assessment of abuse as the instruments of screening and the definitions of abuse were created by specialists. This topic is very important to understand both the cultural and individual dimensions of abusive behaviors and also to clarify the meaning of the prevalence rates of abuse. The scarcity of works on this particular topic is quite understandable: The most commonly used methodologies to study representations of abuse are based on interviews and on the content analysis of interviews, making this form of research quite elaborated. It provides knowledge mainly on what older adults understand by the several forms of abuse and what explanations they provide for it. On the matter of what is abuse, the older adults' representations are congruent with the definitions of the several types of abuse, with a few differences (Fernandes 2011; Coler 2014; Henriques 2013). First, sexual abuse is not considered by most of the older adults. This might be because they consider that it does not exist, or



because it might be a socially awkward topic to disclose about (Henriques 2013). Second, the relative importance given by the older adults to abandonment and psychological abuse is worthy of considerations (Fernandes 2011; Henriques 2013). These studies highlight that abandonment generates more revolt than any other form of abuse, as well as psychological abuse, can be more harmful than physical abuse. Also, of importance are the representations older adults have of the causes of abuse. Results of these studies indicate that the principal causes attributed to abuse are mainly concerned with social modifications, particularly with what is characterized as the absence of values and the growing individualism of the families. Other factors, like the lack of mutual comprehension between the family members and perceptions of the ingratitude of the caregivers, when they are the sons or immediate family are also used by the older adults to explain the occurrence of abuse (Henriques 2013; Fernandes 2011). Research in this area is of importance because it allows better insights to how to approach the subject of abuse and, most importantly, helps understand how older adults might experience it. An insight on how older adults experience abuse is of importance to understand the extension of the damage, namely to the psychological well-being of the older adult, and is also a key information for the elaboration of intervention strategies.

Summing up, the recent developments in research on older adults' mistreatment in Portugal are still very thin when compared with other countries or studies of violence on other populations. Three major prevalence studies were conducted in our country and they revealed either average or impressively high rates of older adults' mistreatment. These discrepancies in the data between countries can be explained by various factors, but results support the possibility that the prevalence of older adults' mistreatment in Portugal might be higher than in many other European countries. Like in many other countries, the validation or development of screening measures for older adults' mistreatment has been problematic. The absence of a gold standard is probably the main difficulty in this field. Some steps are currently being taken to grant further understanding of the phenomena of older adults' mistreatment, namely trying to understand the perception of older adults about abuse. Achieving a better understanding of how abuse emerges, what characteristics of the older adult, caregiver, and their relationship are associated with abuse, how some behaviors are considered abusive or not are just a few sensible steps needed to achieve a further understanding of older adults' mistreatment as phenomena. Achieving a further understanding of the problem would clarify some of the current problems in the field, namely improving the existent ways to identify older adults'

mistreatment. This knowledge would be obviously the launch door for the elaboration of prevention programs and of appropriate intervention strategies.

### **Legal Framework for Support and Prevention Initiatives**

Support for the victims of older adults' mistreatment may come in different forms, but in the Portuguese case, the phenomenon is legally considered a form of domestic violence (Portugal 2016). The same structures that provide aid for the victims of domestic violence, provide aid to the victims of older adults' mistreatment. There is no formal specialization for screen or support older adults' mistreatment. In the next paragraphs, we're going to explore what structures are available in Portugal to help older adults that are being victims, how they work and what kind of initiatives are currently undergoing.

As previously stated, in the Portuguese legislation, older adults' mistreatment is considered a form of domestic violence (Portugal 2016). Domestic violence, and by extension older adults' mistreatment, is considered a public crime. This means that prosecution can be made for free by public officials or lawyers, as long as they have knowledge of the situation ("Ministério Público E O Crime" 2016), which requires that someone, anyone, reports it. The person that files the complaint can be anyone, the police department, a physician, a neighbor or the victim him/herself. The existence of a complaint is the base requirement to be granted the victim statute and receive support.

According to the Portuguese criminal law (Portugal 2016), domestic violence is classified in article number 152º, as physical or psychic mistreatment, repeated or not, against a spouse/partner, current or not, or someone described as "particularly defenseless". Among the reasons why someone would be particularly defenseless in age and it's not specified if the defencelessness is due to young or old age. Legally, child mistreatment would be no different than adult mistreatment if there wasn't a subparagraph that states that if the victim was a minor, or a minor was present during the offensive facts, the applied sentence increases from 1 to 5 years to 2 to 5. Portuguese law is a good example of how cultural representations can influence legislations, in this particular case, this preconception of old age as a synonym of frailty. So, when older adults' mistreatment is perpetrated by the spouse or partner, the act of violence is considered domestic violence, but if it is portrayed by another family member upon whom the older adult does not depend on, the act is viewed as domestic violence because the older adult is vulnerable due to his/her age. The article 152º of the Portuguese criminal code is the legislation created mainly to punish the perpetrators of domestic abuse, but there is another law that

aims to provide the victims with support. The Law Decree number 112/2009 of 16 of September (2009), recently updated (*Law Decree no 129/2015 of 3 of September 2015*), clarifies the legal regime applied to the victims of domestic violence. In this regime, older adults are considered “especially vulnerable victims” (Article 2) due to “advanced age”. This Law Decree regulates what is necessary to be considered a victim of domestic violence and what is necessary to acquire the victim statute, a document that officially recognizes the victim as such and that allows him/her to ask for support. Any kind of support to the victim is given only if the victim agrees to receive it. Plus, to be entitled to the victim statute, a report has to be filed and there should be no strong leads that the complaint is false. It is clear from both the Portuguese Criminal Code and in the Law Decrees just explored that there are some preconceptions about older adults as frail due to the chronological age that seems deeply rooted in our culture.

The first aspect in offering support that is generally available is to provide the victims with information. In this way, many entities invest in providing means to divulge information about how to proceed in case one is victimized, explaining how to get help, from whom, the legal ramifications of the complaint, how the complaint will be processed in court and so forth. Two important sources of this information are the Infovictims platform and the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV).

The Infovictims is a website built with funding from the European Union and that serves 5 countries (Portugal, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany and Scotland; (“Infovítimas” 2016). This website provides information for the potential victims of any crime, with information about how, where and to whom is a complaint filed, how a hearing proceeds, provides useful contacts and more general information, like the rights of the victims. This website is not specific to help older adults. In fact, information divulged online is unlikely to reach the general older adult population, because the base rate of use of the internet by older adults in Portugal is still low. Statistics from PORDATA (2016) show that in 2015 about 27.2% of the older adults between 65 and 74 years old used the internet. Though this number nearly tripled in the last 5 years (in 2010 only 10.4% made use of the internet in the same age range), this number shows that the internet might not be the most efficient way to divulge information to the general older adult population.

APAV has a different approach. The APAV is the service that is usually more associated with victim support in our country. They provide information online but also for other campaigns that include television spots, outdoors and posters in several key

locations, like the service desks of the social security, finances, and hospitals, as well as other measures directly in the community. This institution is a national organization without profit goals, with projects in common with government institutions like the national healthcare system and is specialized in providing support to victims of crime in general (APAV 2015). Besides divulging information, the support provided includes psychological, juridical and social one. APAV also acknowledges the necessity to support specifically the older adults' population, including the victims of abuse. Specific for the purpose of disposing of some general guidelines to help professionals in answering to the needs of the older adult, APAV, in partnership with Lusofona University, developed a manual for professionals to attend the older adult population (APAV 2010). Though not specialized in abuse, most of the cases supported end up being classified as domestic violence, which is how abuse is legally classified in Portugal. The statistics the association have available for the general public, namely from 2013 and 2014, about the support provided to older adults show that 80% of the cases they support fall under the designation of domestic violence (APAV 2013). Also, they noted an increase of about 10% in the number of older adults that requested support, from 2013 to 2014. Also, as expected, the more common perpetrator is the son/daughter, followed by spouse/partner that together represented 65.4% of the perpetrators of crimes against older adults. Between 2013 and 2014 this service has provided support to 3286 cases of domestic violence against older adults (APAV 2013). Considering the prevalence rates discussed earlier, this number is astronomically low, adding to the idea that most cases of older adults' mistreatment still pass under the radar.

There are also government institutions that provide support to victims, like the social security services but are not specific to provide aid to older adults that are victims (ISS 2016). The social security services provide support for older adults, namely by referring them to day-care facilities and others and this has a price, generally calculated from the income of the family. The support given to the victims of domestic violence is usually done by referring them to shelter-houses or to aid centers, where they will receive other forms of support. However, the kind of support provided to the older adults that are victims of abuse might not be as standardized as in these other cases. Other, more general, support structures are available. Good examples are the telephone lines that are usually used for healthcare purposes. This lines usually provide the necessary connections between the older adult and other authorities that may speed the process of providing aid to the victims of abuse. One of this support lines that is worthy of mention is the senior

citizen's line (Portugal 2016). This support line was created in 1999 by the Portuguese justice ombudsman with the aim of providing information and help in dealing with problems specific to the elderly population. This free service can provide older adults' victims of abuse with the information necessary for them to file a complaint, can direct them to the services that will investigate and deal with the situation and provide other support.

The support network that can be used by victims of older adults' mistreatment is mainly focused on acting after an abusive situation has happened. On the prevention level, the initiatives are scarce. The spreading of information about abuse may be seen as a preventive strategy by itself, but generally preventive strategies that involve crime and older adults are not about abuse. One good example is the program "Support 65", a program developed by the law enforcement agencies (PSP 2016). The law enforcement agencies organize preventive campaigns in which they visit older adults in their homes and advert them against common crimes in the area, and spread information about self-protection, namely in whom not to trust, how to get help and so forth. These measures, however, are not specific for older adults' mistreatment. In fact, their major focus seems to be against crimes that involve cons and material gain. However, the police forces also use this campaigns to scout older adults that are isolated from their families or live alone or that are neglected in some way, which can be useful information to provide a rapid response and to allocate aid.

Summarizing, in the last few paragraphs, some of the most usual methods to offer support to the older adults, victims of abuse in Portugal and some features of its legal framework were described. There seems that some supportive structures are available for older adults and for victims of domestic violence, but specialized support for victims of older adults' mistreatment is non-existent. In the Portuguese legislation, older adults' mistreatment is no different than domestic violence, with the same legal repercussions. Since the agencies that provide support for both victims of domestic violence and for older adults, independently, are ruled by the Portuguese law, it is no surprise that no specific answers are available for this problem. The support measures available are mostly related to information spreading on how to proceed. This obviously does not take into consideration some particularities of the phenomenon of older adults' mistreatment, where dependency on others, isolation and the need of counselling or advice are common. In this way, the sole act of gathering information to report an abusive situation can be challenging. Moreover, the strategic initiatives described are not specific for older adults'

mistreatment and are unlikely to approach the majority of the potential victims of older adults' mistreatment. Although the regular visits of the law enforcement agencies to older adults that reside alone or with other older adult are likely to reduce the risk of abuse, besides spreading information that older adults' mistreatment happens is being done to help the older adults that reside with their sons or daughters, for example. Initiatives to prevent older adults' mistreatment and efficient ways to help the victims are still under development and they are a cornerstone to provide an appropriate service to the older adult.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we explored the current situation in Portugal regarding older adults' mistreatment. First, we focused on the current national trends in research, specifically the major prevalence studies, the attempts to provide measures for older adults' mistreatment and a beginning in trying to understand the process of abuse. Then, we explored the current supportive measures for abuse and its legal framework, discussing mainly the absence of specific structures to offer support to older adults' mistreatment.

The topic of older adults' mistreatment is quite recent in our country. It is not surprising that some areas like the development of screening measures and the offer of specific support for older adults that were subjected to abuse are still underdeveloped.

The prevalence data gathered in our country is sufficient to raise concern. Even if there are problems with the measures masking the results, the fact is that the prevalence of older adults' mistreatment in our country is higher than in other European countries when using the same measures and procedures. This reason alone should be more than sufficient to motivate the study of the phenomena in our country. However, research on the topic has found some obstacles. The one that is probably the most disturbing is the problem of the measures. Without reliable measures the research on the topic becomes difficult. But the development of a good measure passes by understanding more than the mere signs of the phenomena, it passes by understanding the processes that are subjacent to abuse. This implies gaining an understanding of what is subjacent to the beginning of abuse and to its maintenance. And this first sensible steps are slowly being taken and are a necessary condition for the development of more specific support measures for the victims.

Another topic of major importance and that is neglected is the prevention of older adults' mistreatment. More than information about what constitutes abuse, the prevention of older adults' mistreatment passes through the acquisition of skills that allow the provision of adequate care. The adequate care for the older adult in the family setting would undoubtedly prevent most of the cases of older adults' mistreatment.

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