



Moral intuitions, social skills, and elder abuse: exploring a social exchange hypothesis

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Abstract

Purpose: In this study, we operationalize and test some predictions of a social exchange theory of elder abuse. The theory proposes that the combination of low resources and high dependency/low relational power increases the older adult's risk of abuse. We tested these predictions by exploring the association between morality (indicator of resources) and abuse, moderated by social skills (indicator of power).

Methodology: This was an exploratory study. We collected data from 62 participants between 64 and 94 years old who frequented social-recreational centres.

Findings: We found a positive association between the moral intuition harm/care and the report of emotionally and financially abusive behaviours and denial of rights. The moral intuition authority/respect is negatively associated with the same types of abuse. The effects of moral intuitions on the types of abuse increased in older adults with generally high social skills and low assertiveness.

Originality: Our study provided initial results for a psychological interpretation of a social exchange theory of elder abuse and highlighted the importance of relational models where moral intuitions interact with social skills to predict elder abuse.

Keywords: elder abuse; social exchange theory; theories of abuse; morality; social skills

Moral intuitions, social skills and elder abuse: exploring a social exchange hypothesis

Elder abuse is defined as a single or repeated act (or absence of appropriate action) conducted by a person in whom the older adult trusts, resulting in harm or distress (World Health Organization, 2002). Numerous studies have been conducted in this area, mainly focusing on prevalence and risk factors for older adults and caregivers. However, theoretical development in this field has been scarce, despite being necessary for practical purposes; if a theoretical model can explain how abuse happens, it can help prevent abuse.

There are multiple theoretical approaches to elder abuse. A recent systematic review listed thirteen theories referenced as explanations of elder abuse (Fundinho, Pereira, *et al.*, 2021). This review looked for empirical evidence supporting six of these theories and found that most theories have empirical support. The authors point out that social exchange theory, as a broad theory, is a good starting point to work on an integrated solution. Nevertheless, before attempting an integrative theory, we should explore elder abuse through the basic assumptions of social exchange theory. Therefore, this paper aims to examine elder abuse through social exchange theory and explore how personal characteristics that may direct our selection of behaviours in social interactions, namely moral intuitions, are related to elder abuse. Additionally, we aim to test whether moral intuitions are affected by variables that impact the power/dependency balance, namely social skills.

Social exchange theory proposes that every social interaction is an exchange of resources, which can be material – e.g., trading money for an object – or nonmaterial – e.g., trading a favour for social acceptance - where both parties try to maximize rewards and reduce costs. In a balanced exchange, all involved parties feel that they have profited equally and, therefore, are satisfied (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). Elder abuse does not occur in balanced exchanges but in unbalanced exchanges. If an older adult finds it difficult to produce or use resources, rewarding exchanges may also become more difficult. Plus, if

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3 needs increase, more frequent exchanges may be required. Increased needs while facing
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5 difficulties in rewarding exchanges and relying on limited partners for exchange leads to
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7 dependency on one person, typically the caregiver. The principles of social exchange theory
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9 tell us that one person's dependence gives the other more power over the relationship (Blau,
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11 1964). Building on these two elementary premises – a) exchanges require resources and b)
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13 power/dependence are fundamental to understanding exchanges - we can hypothesize a
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15 social exchange theory of elder abuse (Fundinho, 2022). These premisses suggest that when
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17 an older adult continually depends on a caregiver, the likelihood of unbalanced exchanges
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19 increases, as there is a disturbance of the power/dependence balance. With more power, the
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21 caregiver can set the tone for future exchanges, always trying to maximize rewards (or cut
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23 losses). Some strategies used to maximize rewards may involve abusive behaviours. For
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25 example, a caregiver might withdraw from care, resulting in neglect, or take monetary
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27 compensation by force, as in financial exploitation. In other cases, a caregiver might be
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29 unable to find alternative strategies to increase the gains from the relationship, so inflicting
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31 pain or distress is used to increase the cost of exchange for the older adult. We can frame
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33 physical and emotional abuse in this scenario, classifying it as a lose-lose scenario.
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40 From the social exchange theoretical standpoint, anything that can lead to unbalanced
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42 exchanges may increase the risk of abuse. From this social exchange theory of elder abuse,
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44 we can make some predictions to start exploring its empirical support. The first prediction is
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46 that the risk of unbalanced relationships increases with fewer resources to trade. Material
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48 resources are easier to identify, and previous research has shown a positive link between the
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50 lower income of older adults and abuse (e.g., Naughton *et al.*, 2012). Nonmaterial resources
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52 are used in most social interactions but can be challenging to understand. Blau (1964) lists
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54 some nonmaterial resources, such as social approval or respect/prestige. However, the
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56 behavioural representation of these resources can vary widely (e.g., a handshake, a
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compliment), making it impossible to inventory them thoroughly. We can contour this issue by looking at factors that directly impact the selection of the behaviours we include in exchanges. General behavioural tendencies could be of help in this task. For example, research has found a positive association between older adults' neuroticism and overall abuse (Li *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, we hypothesize that moral judgments may directly influence the selection of resources. According to moral foundations theory, humans have intuitive ethics that give them a sense of approval or disapproval for certain behaviours (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). This theory describes five foundations and modules of intuition to approve or disapprove of things based on our species' evolutionary history and culture (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). Like personality, moral intuitions could play a role in selecting resources for exchange. The moral foundations theory suggests that individuals are more likely to behave within what they consider morally acceptable. Likewise, they are likely to avoid performing behaviours they find morally unacceptable.

The second prediction concerns the power/dependency problem. Power and dependency are expected to influence the relationship between resources and the outcome of an exchange. In the case of elder abuse, we expect higher dependence to increase the risk of unbalanced relationships, while relational power decreases risk. Some research supports the association between elder abuse and dependency, although usually focused on functional dependence (e.g., Burnes *et al.*, 2015; Orfila *et al.*, 2018). However, power is expected to be as influential as dependence in determining the outcome of exchanges but is seldom explored. In this study, we chose to explore the role of power determinants. We hypothesize that social skills influence the power balance, making a person a more or less attractive partner for interaction. Social skills are a set of behavioural tendencies that are culturally valued and established to have a high probability of producing favourable interpersonal interactions (Del Prette and Del Prette, 2018). Social skills are more than behaviours; therefore, we do not

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2
3 conceptualize them as resources. For example, we cannot exchange the social skill
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5 “assertiveness”, but we can conduct exchanges assertively. Thus, social skills influence our
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7 exchanges by shaping our resources. As a result, we conceptualize social skills as power
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9 indicators. Some social skills might make one a more attractive person to interact with, while
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11 other social skills are less appealing, affecting the power balance of a relationship (Dowd,
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13 1975). We expect social skills to have a role in the dynamics of abuse by directly affecting
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15 the power/dependence balance. Therefore, we study them as moderating the relationship
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17 between moral intuitions and abuse.
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22 This paper aims to gather some initial empirical data to assert the viability of the
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24 revamped social exchange theory of elder abuse presented and the proposed paradigm to test
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26 it. We have two objectives. The first is to explore the relationship between the moral
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28 intuitions identified in moral foundations theory- our indicators of resources - and the
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30 multiple forms of abuse. Second, to explore the role of social skills as moderators between
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32 moral intuitions and multiple forms of abuse.
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35 **Methodology**

36 ***Participants***

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38 A partnership was established with eight social-recreational centres for adults in Minho,
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40 Portugal, in 2018 to recruit participants. Before their participation, all older adults answered
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42 the Mini-Mental State Examination (Folstein *et al.*, 1975, Portuguese version by Guerreiro *et*
43
44 *al.*, 1994), which was used as a selection criterion. Considering our reliance on self-report
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46 measures, we only included older adults who screened negative for cognitive impairment. A
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48 total of 62 older adults (40 women) aged between 64 and 94 years old ($M=79.44$, $SD=8.617$)
49
50 participated in the current study. Most participants were widowers (41.9%) or married
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52 (32.3%), with a few who were single (14.5%) or divorced (11.3%). Most participants had
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54 completed elementary school (71%), but 16.1% attended but did not complete this level,
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3 having learned to read and perform basic mathematical operations. Only 12.9% of the
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5 participants had a higher educational level than elementary school.
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8 *Measures*

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10 We administered three measures in this study: a measure of moral intuitions according to
11
12 moral foundations theory, a measure of social skills, and a measure of abusive behaviours.
13

14 *Moral intuitions*

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16 Moral foundations theory (Haidt and Joseph, 2004) proposes five foundations or intuitions
17
18 that guide our ethical approval or disapproval of something. These five foundations are
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20 harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. We
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22 used the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham *et al.*, 2011) to assess the importance of
23
24 each of these five bases. This measure has 32 items, divided into two parts. First, participants
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26 rate the level of importance of a set of affirmations when deciding if something is good or
27
28 evil on a scale of 0 (totally unimportant) to 6 (extremely important). And next, participants
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30 rate their agreement with some sentences, from 0 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). A
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32 morality profile can be computed with these items, thus understanding the relative
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34 importance of each moral intuition.
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39 *Social Skills*

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41 We used the Social Skills Inventory – Del Prette (Del Prette and Del Prette, 2001),
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43 Portuguese version by Fundinho and collaborators (2021). This measure has 22 items, each
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45 representing a behaviour that requires a specific social skill. The participants rate the
46
47 frequency with which they perform each behaviour using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from
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49 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The six social skills measured in this instrument are conversation
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51 and social confidence, easiness of self-exposure, self-expression of positive affect, coping
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53 assertively with risk, defending interests and opinions, and giving and receiving praise. The
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55 score for each skill is obtained by calculating the responses' mean in each subscale. The
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3 higher the score, the more frequently these social skills are used.
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6 *Abusive behaviours targeted at older adults*

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8 A list of abusive behaviours, compiled based on previous instruments, literature, and
9
10 definitions of abuse, was used to assess how frequently the participants were the target of
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12 abusive behaviours. The items were specifically formulated to fit the paradigm proposed by
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14 social exchange theory. The item phrasing had to describe specific behaviours targeted at the
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16 respondent and abusive by definition (e.g., “*Yelled at me*”). Phrasing the items as behaviours
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18 allows us to consider them as exchange resources. The instruction to the participant was to
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20 respond while thinking about interactions with the person they rely on more frequently to
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22 receive any form of care, for example, physical or emotional support (the person we
23
24 designate hereafter as the “caregiver”). A total of 24 behaviours were listed, assessing
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26 emotional abuse (6 items), financial exploitation (6 items), denial of rights (6 items), and
27
28 neglect (6 items). Given the exploratory nature of our study, we only included the more
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30 prevalent forms of abuse in our country (Santos *et al.*, 2011). The participant was asked to
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32 report which of the listed behaviours (if any) were experienced in the past year.
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38 ***Procedure***

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40 This study was submitted and approved by the ethics committee for social and human
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42 sciences of the University of Minho (SECSH 024/2016). Data collection procedures took
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44 place in 2018. All participants provided written informed consent. Data collection was
45
46 divided into two sessions of 60 minutes, although the pace was adapted to each participant’s
47
48 needs. The primary researcher conducted the sessions in social-recreational centres for adults
49
50 in an adequately lit and comfortable office. All procedures were computerized using
51
52 Psychopy (Peirce *et al.*, 2019) and presented on a touchscreen device with screen dimensions
53
54 the approximate size of a sheet of paper. The researcher read all instructions, questions, and
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56 answering options aloud, and the participants selected their responses using a visual aid on
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the touchscreen.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). As a support tool for moderation analysis, we used PROCESS (Version 3.5) macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). To test our hypotheses, we used multiple stepwise (backward) regressions, hierarchical regressions, and simple slope analyses to check for interaction effects.

Results

First, we will present some descriptive statistics from our measures. Then, we test our hypothesis, starting with exploring the relationship between moral intuitions and the various types of abuse and then exploring the moderating effect of social skills.

Descriptive statistics

Regarding the reports of abuse, summing up all participants' responses, we counted a total of 114 abusive behaviours reported. Twenty participants (32.3%) reported being the target of at least one of the listed behaviours. At least one emotionally abusive behaviour was reported by eight participants (12.9%), and the items showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .919$). Nine participants reported at least one behaviour of financial exploitation, the same number as neglect (14.5%), and their measures showed excellent ($\alpha = .903$) and good internal consistency ($\alpha = .812$), respectively. Last, four participants reported at least one behaviour classified as denial of rights (6.5%), and its measure showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .782$).

Descriptive statistics for moral intuitions are presented in Table 1. In-group/loyalty showed the highest minimum value, and purity/sanctity had the lowest mean. The descriptive statistics for social skills are also presented in Table 1. Giving and receiving praise had the highest minimum and the highest average, while easiness of self-exposure had the lowest

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3 maximum and the lowest mean.

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5 ---Please insert Table 1 here---

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8 ***Relationship between moral intuitions and abuse***

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10 We conducted a series of regression analyses to understand which moral intuitions best
11 predict elder abuse. With no previous works to guide our search for predictors, we conducted
12 a stepwise (backward) regression (Field, 2009). Fairness/reciprocity was excluded from the
13 analysis after checking the multicollinearity assumption. The regression analysis results for
14 each type of abuse are summarized in Table 2. No significant regression equation was found
15 for neglect, indicating that none of our variables was a good predictor for this form of abuse.
16 The results show that the best predictors for the other three types of abusive behaviours were
17 moral intuitions harm/care, and authority/respect. The same pattern was present in the three
18 types of abusive behaviour: greater concern with preventing harm/care is associated with
19 reporting more abusive behaviours, and lower concerns with authority and traditions are
20 associated with reporting more abusive behaviours.
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35 ---Please insert Table 2 here---

36
37 ***The moderating role of social skills in the relationship between moral intuitions and abuse***

38 We conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to explore the moderating role of
39 social skills in the relationship between moral intuitions and abuse. We included the moral
40 intuitions harm/care and authority/respect and the explored social skill in the first step, adding
41 the interaction terms in the second step. Table 3 presents a summary of the analysis.
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49 ---Please insert Table 3 here---

50
51 There was no moderation effect of conversation and social confidence, self-
52 expression of positive affect, or giving and receiving praise regarding emotional abuse. There
53 was a significant interaction effect between easiness of self-exposure and authority/respect.
54 Simple slope analysis indicates that at low levels of the social skill, there was no relationship
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between authority/respect and emotional abuse ($b = -.285, t(56) = -.558, p = .579$). However, at medium levels, there was a negative effect ($b = -1.271, t(56) = -3.235, p = .002$) that nearly doubled at high levels ($b = -2.399, t(56) = -3.084, p = .003$) of the social skill. This result means that for participants who find it easier to expose themselves socially, every point of importance given to the respect of authorities and traditions is associated with two fewer emotionally abusive behaviours reported.

Another significant interaction was found between coping assertively with risk and both harm/care and authority/respect. The results indicate that at medium levels of coping assertively with risk, there is a positive effect between harm/care and emotional abuse ($b = .962, t(56) = 2.177, p = .034$), that doubles at low levels ($b = 2.118, t(56) = 3.351, p = .001$). This result means that for participants who find it more challenging to be assertive, every point of importance given to caring and protection from harm is associated with reporting two more emotionally abusive behaviours. There was no relationship at high levels of assertiveness ($b = -.194, t(56) = -.245, p = .807$). This pattern reverses with authority/respect, where at high ($b = .364, t(56) = .542, p = .590$) and medium levels of assertiveness ($b = -.678, t(56) = -1.769, p = .082$), there is no relationship between authority/respect and emotional abuse. However, at low levels of assertiveness, for every point of importance given to authority/respect, nearly two fewer emotionally abusive behaviours are reported ($b = -1.720, t(56) = -3.430, p = .001$).

We found the inverse pattern with defending interests and opinions. The results indicate that at low levels ($b = -.637, t(56) = -.720, p = .475$) and medium levels of defending interests and opinions ($b = .623, t(56) = 1.340, p = .186$), there is no relationship between harm/care and emotional abuse. However, at high levels, for every point of importance given to caring and protection from harm, almost two more emotionally abusive behaviours are reported ($b = 1.882, t(56) = 3.190, p = .002$). Once again, the direction of the relationship

EMOTION, MORALITY AND ELDER ABUSE

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3 changes when looking at authority/respect. At low levels ($b = .229, t(56) = .412, p = .682$)
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5 and medium levels ($b = -.590, t(56) = -1.540, p = .129$), there is no relationship. However, at
6
7 high levels of defending interests and opinions, for every two points of importance given to
8
9 the respect of traditions and authority, three fewer emotionally abusive behaviours are
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11 reported ($b = -1.408, t(56) = -2.944, p = .005$).
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15 As seen in Table 3, financial abuse only had significant interaction terms in coping
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17 assertively with risk and defending interests and opinions. The results show that at high levels
18
19 of assertiveness, there is no relationship between harm/care and financial abuse ($b = -.406,$
20
21 $t(56) = -.544, p = .589$). However, at medium levels, there is an effect ($b = .933, t(56) =$
22
23 $2.239, p = .029$) that more than doubles at low levels of assertiveness ($b = 2.271, t(56) =$
24
25 $3.812, p < .001$). This result means that for the less assertive participants, one more point of
26
27 importance given to the protection from harm is associated with reporting two more
28
29 financially abusive behaviours. Similarly, but in the opposite direction, at high levels ($b =$
30
31 $.629, t(56) = .991, p = .326$) and medium levels of assertiveness ($b = -.604, t(56) = -1.670, p$
32
33 $= .100$), there was no relationship between authority/respect and financial abuse. However, at
34
35 low levels of assertiveness, every point of importance given to respect for authority is
36
37 associated with reporting nearly two fewer financially abusive behaviours ($b = -1.836, t(56) =$
38
39 $-3.883, p < .001$).
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45 Regarding the skill of defending interests and opinions, at low ($b = -.660, t(56) = -$
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47 $.774, p = .442$) and medium levels ($b = .635, t(56) = 1.419, p = .162$), there is no relationship
48
49 between harm/care and financial abuse. However, at high levels of defending interests and
50
51 opinions, every point of importance given to protection from harm is associated with almost
52
53 two more emotionally abusive behaviours ($b = 1.930, t(56) = 3.396, p = .001$). Likewise, at
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55 low levels ($b = .309, t(56) = .578, p = .565$) and medium levels of defending interests and
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57 opinions ($b = -.584, t(56) = -1.583, p = .119$), there is no relationship between
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3 authority/respect and financial abuse. However, at high levels of defending interests and
4
5 opinions, for every two points of importance given to authority, three fewer financially
6
7 abusive behaviours are reported ($b = -1.477, t(56) = -3.204, p = .002$).

10 Denial of rights has the highest number of interactions. Only self-expression of
11
12 positive affect did not interfere with the relationship between moral intuitions and denial of
13
14 rights. A few patterns emerge when looking at the results. There were significant interaction
15
16 effects between harm/care and denial of rights at medium levels of the skills conversation and
17
18 social confidence ($b = .685, t(56) = 2.873, p = .006$), easiness of self-exposure ($b = .934, t(56)$
19
20 $= 3.982, p < .001$), coping assertively with risk ($b = .652, t(56) = 3.028, p = .004$), defending
21
22 interests and opinions ($b = .473, t(56) = 2.012, p = .049$) and giving and receiving praise ($b =$
23
24 $.859, t(56) = 3.514, p = .001$). Likewise, there were significant interaction effects between
25
26 authority/respect and denial of rights at medium levels of conversation and social confidence
27
28 ($b = -.709, t(56) = -3.589, p = .001$), easiness of self-exposure ($b = -1.046, t(56) = -5.046, p <$
29
30 $.001$), coping assertively with risk ($b = -.568, t(56) = -3.041, p = .004$), defending interests
31
32 and opinions ($b = -.607, t(56) = -3.132, p = .003$) and giving and receiving praise ($b = -.748,$
33
34 $t(56) = -3.739, p < .001$). There was no effect of harm/care on denial of rights in lower levels
35
36 of conversation and social confidence ($b = -.098, t(56) = -.236, p = .814$), easiness of self-
37
38 exposure ($b = .263, t(56) = .773, p = .443$), defending interests and opinions ($b = -.490, t(56)$
39
40 $= -1.093, p = .279$) and giving and receiving praise ($b = .339, t(56) = 1.121, p = .267$). At
41
42 lower levels of coping assertively with risk, there was a positive association between
43
44 harm/care and denial of rights ($b = 1.720, t(56) = 5.587, p < .001$). We found the same pattern
45
46 in the relationship between authority/respect and denial of rights. No association was found at
47
48 lower levels of conversation and social confidence ($b = -.077, t(56) = -.235, p = .815$),
49
50 easiness of self-exposure ($b = -.272, t(56) = -1.009, p = .317$), defending interests and
51
52 opinions ($b = .146, t(56) = .521, p = .605$) and giving and receiving praise ($b = -.266, t(56) =$
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-.929, $p = .357$). However, we found a negative association between authority/respect and denial of rights at lower levels of coping assertively with risk ($b = -1.196$, $t(56) = -6.357$, $p < .001$). These results indicate two things: 1) at lower levels of assertiveness, giving importance to care and protection from harm is associated with reporting more behaviours that constitute denial of rights and; 2) giving importance to authority and respect of traditions is associated with reporting fewer behaviours that constitute denial of rights.

Concerning the social skills at their highest levels, our first result is that at high levels of coping assertively with risk, there is no relationship between denial of rights and harm/care ($b = -.417$, $t(56) = -1.079$, $p = .285$) or authority/respect ($b = .418$, $t(56) = 1.274$, $p = .208$). The second result is that, for the other social skills, there were positive and significant associations between harm/care and denial of rights at high levels of conversation and social confidence ($b = 1.468$, $t(56) = 4.617$, $p < .001$), easiness of self-exposure ($b = 1.702$, $t(56) = 4.729$, $p < .001$), defending interests and opinions ($b = 1.437$, $t(56) = 4.810$, $p < .001$) and giving and receiving praise ($b = 1.282$, $t(56) = 3.967$, $p < .001$). Meanwhile, there were negative associations between authority/respect and denial of rights at high levels of conversation and social confidence ($b = -1.341$, $t(56) = -4.874$, $p < .001$), easiness of self-exposure ($b = -1.932$, $t(56) = -4.707$, $p < .001$), defending interests and opinions ($b = -1.361$, $t(56) = -5.618$, $p < .001$) and giving and receiving praise ($b = -1.141$, $t(56) = -4.748$, $p < .001$). These results mean that at higher levels of conversation and social confidence, easiness of self-exposure, defending interests and opinions and giving and receiving praise, giving importance to care and protection from harm is associated with reporting more behaviours that comprise denial of rights. In opposition, giving importance to authority and respect is associated with reporting fewer behaviours of denial of rights.

Discussion

The present study intends to contribute to the theoretical development in the field of elder

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2
3 abuse. The study was designed to test some predictions of a social exchange theory of elder
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5 abuse. No previous studies have explicitly explored this theory. Our initial and exploratory
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7 results may help indicate a viable paradigm to test this theory and serve as an initial step to
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9 approach this theory of elder abuse. We related moral intuitions (variables determining what
10
11 resources we use in an exchange) to abuse. We studied how this relation is moderated by
12
13 social skills, which we consider an indicator of relational power.
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17 The first important result to discuss is the frequency of abusive behaviours reported
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19 by the participants of this study. Nearly one-third of the participants reported being the target
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21 of at least one abusive behaviour, which is congruent with previous prevalence studies in
22
23 Portugal (Santos *et al.*, 2011). Denial of rights is usually not considered in the more
24
25 frequently used abuse typologies, although it is conceptually aligned with the definition of the
26
27 World Health Organization (2002). With the inclusion of moral intuitions in this study,
28
29 variables related to perceptions of individual and group rights (Haidt and Joseph, 2004), the
30
31 inclusion of denial of rights looked important and yielded interesting results. With other
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33 variables as indicators of resources, this form of abuse might not yield as many interesting
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35 results.
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40 ***The relevance of psychological variables in elder abuse***

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42 The current study contributed to developing a social exchange view of abuse by
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44 testing new psychological variables that determine the resources used in exchanges. We
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46 found that moral intuitions play a role in vulnerability and protection from abuse. The main
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48 results indicate that greater concerns with harm/care are associated with an increased risk of
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50 emotional abuse, financial abuse, and denial of rights. According to moral foundations
51
52 theory, the harm/care intuition is related to an innate feeling of care for others and the ability
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54 to dislike and feel pain in others (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). One possible explanation for this
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56 result is that people concerned with care may more easily detect transactions that put care at
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3 risk. This concern might lead to confrontations when older adults consider they are not being
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5 cared for as they wish. Thus, the harm/care intuition could act in two ways on a social
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7 exchange-conceptualized abuse. First, it can lower the threshold of what exchanges are
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9 considered abusive by violating an ethical perspective oriented toward taking care of oneself
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11 and others. Second, it can stimulate confrontations regarding the appropriate care method,
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13 which may be abusive. We also found that higher importance given to authority/respect is
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15 associated with decreased risk of emotional abuse, financial abuse, and denial of rights.
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17 Moral foundations theory states that our history of hierarchical social relationships, where
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19 traditions and legitimate authority are respected, is the basis of moral intuition
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21 authority/respect (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). One possible explanation for this result is that the
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23 more powerful agent in a relationship may be viewed as an authority figure. Persons who
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25 give higher importance to authority figures might avoid confrontations, maintain a stable
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27 power balance and prevent abusive exchanges.
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34 Interestingly, one moral intuition is associated with risk, while another is associated
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36 with protection. Social exchange theory is typically simplified in terms of lacking resources
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38 and being dependent as the main precursors for risk. However, these results indicate that
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40 persons' core beliefs can also shape exchanges, changing how we can use social exchange
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42 theory to conceptualize abuse. Moreover, such results hint that various psychological
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44 variables that change the selection and availability of resources for trade also provide relevant
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46 information to understand this phenomenon and safeguard older adults.
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49 ***The importance of social skills in elder abuse***

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51 We studied the moderating role of social skills in the relationship between moral
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53 intuitions and elder abuse. We found that only self-expression of positive affect had no
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55 moderating effect between moral intuitions and abuse. Additionally, different forms of abuse
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57 were moderated by different social skills. The only constants were coping assertively with
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3 risk and defending interests and opinions. The relationship between moral intuitions and
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5 abuse was only present at lower levels of coping assertively with risk, meaning that moral
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7 intuitions have no role in predicting abuse for the more assertive participants. In the case of
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9 defending interests and opinions, we found an effect of moral intuitions on abuse in the
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11 higher levels of the skill. These were the two primary social skills affecting the relationship
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13 between moral intuitions and emotional and financial abuse, and their combination is
14
15 fascinating. High scores in defending interests and opinions could mean the defence of
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17 oneself. However, low assertiveness may mean doing it in a confrontational, aggressive, or
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19 passive manner. These forms of interaction could decrease what is described in social
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21 exchange theory as social value (Dowd, 1975).
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26 Denial of rights showed more interactions between social skills and moral intuitions.
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28 One possible interpretation of this result comes to mind when we realize that moral intuitions
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30 and the defence of human rights have an ethical facet. That facet could explain why these two
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32 variables are closely related.
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35 ***Limitations, future research, and implications***

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37 One significant limitation is our small sample size. We designed this study to explore
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39 a theory and relationships previously unexplored. We had no previous works to guide us with
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41 effect size estimations; consequently, sample size estimation is challenging. In this study, we
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43 explored new variables and a new conceptual paradigm, thus increasing our uncertainty with
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45 sample calculations. Nevertheless, we considered that a small sample size would be best for a
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47 first exploration. Another limitation of this study is its focus on dyadic relationships. Social
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49 exchange theory can be used to conceptualize complex relationships between more than two
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51 individuals; however, due to our study's exploratory nature and reduced scope, we chose to
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53 restrict our approach to dyadic relationships. Although results require confirmation and must
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55 be interpreted carefully, they indicate that the tested conceptualization of elder abuse is worth
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3 further study.
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6 In general, this study supports a social exchange theory of elder abuse. Although these
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8 results are exploratory, they suggest that the social exchange explanation for elder abuse
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10 should be expanded beyond a view focused on the deficit of resources to a perspective
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12 focused on patterns of behaviour determined, among others, by moral intuitions and social
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14 skills. This study opens a field of new possibilities for research. It is necessary to continue
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16 studying social exchange as an explanation for elder abuse by checking more variables that
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18 determine social behaviour and their relation to abuse and studying the effects of other
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20 variables that affect the power balance in a relationship. Plus, relationships work both ways.
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22 Social exchange theory can also be used to understand the abusive caregiver's perspective. In
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24 this study, we focused on the older adult's perspective and role in the relationship with the
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26 caregiver. Future research could explore the caregiver's perspective.
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31 By its exploratory nature, our study alone is not enough to warrant changes in
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33 practice. Nevertheless, more empirical support for a social exchange approach to elder abuse
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35 could be used to understand elder abuse as a phenomenon and expand and improve risk
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37 assessment. The indication that multiple variables related to human behaviour function as risk
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39 or protective factors suggests that a thorough risk assessment could include these variables in
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41 the future. Factors that contribute to making interacting with someone more or less attractive
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43 should be considered in risk assessment since they regulate the effects of the risk and
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45 protective factors previously mentioned. These factors could, perhaps, contribute to a more
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47 accurate system to assess risk, thus improving our ability to protect older adults from abuse.
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51 ***Conclusion*** 52

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54 To conclude, this study further elaborates on how social exchange theory can be used
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56 as an explanatory theory for elder abuse. We also explored some previously unknown
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58 predictors of elder abuse. Further research is needed to confirm these findings and take social
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3 exchange further. Nevertheless, this theoretical perspective can guide the intervention and
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5 prevention of elder abuse. The study of the resources for “trade” within a relationship
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7 reminds us how central it is to the elder abuse field to understand how psychological
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9 variables of the older person contribute to risk or protection from abuse.
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Table 1

Descriptive statistics for moral intuitions and social skills.

	Min	Max	Mean (SD)
Moral Intuitions			
Harm/Care	1.50	5.00	4.367 (.761)
Fairness/Reciprocity	1.00	5.00	4.302 (.775)
In-group/Loyalty	2.30	5.00	4.173 (.598)
Authority/Respect	1.00	5.00	4.060 (.889)
Purity/Sanctity	1.50	5.00	3.734 (.836)
Social Skills Total			
	48	90	71.919 (10.815)
Conversation and social confidence	1.33	5.00	3.199 (1.130)
Easiness of self-exposure	1.00	3.80	1.652 (.746)
Self-expression of positive affect	1.75	5.00	4.161 (.805)
Coping assertively with risk	1.00	5.00	3.210 (1.196)
Defending interests and opinions	1.00	5.00	3.855 (.980)
Giving and receiving praise	2.00	5.00	4.339 (.811)

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Table 2

B coefficient (standard error) from stepwise (backward) regression analysis with moral intuitions predicting the reported number of abusive behaviours of the different types of abuse.

	Emotional		Financial		Denial of rights		Neglect ¹
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A
<i>Moral intuitions</i>							
Harm/Care	1.123 (.449)*	1.138 (.437)*	1.062 (.430)*	1.131 (.423)*	.756 (.242)**	.807 (.240)**	.015 (.359)
In-group/Loyalty	-.077 (.519)	-	.226 (.497)	-	.198 (.280)	-	.302 (.415)
Authority/Respect	-.807 (.427)	-.906 (.375)*	-.836 (.409)*	-.874 (.363)*	-.779 (.230)**	-.784 (.205)***	.027 (.341)
Purity/Sanctity	-.248 (.308)	-	-.364 (.295)	-	-.223 (.166)	-	.169 (.246)
<i>R</i> ²	.124	.113	.145	.117	.243	.210	.029
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.062	.083	.097	.087	.190	.183	-.039
<i>F</i>	2.008	3.775*	2.409	3.899*	4.579**	7.834**	.425

Notes: Model A – Full model with all candidate variables; Model B – Final model with best fit.

¹No predictors were found for Neglect; a Model B was not possible to calculate for this type of abuse.

- * *p* < .05
- ** *p* < .01
- *** *p* < .001

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Table 3

B coefficient (standard error) at Step 2 of hierarchical regression analysis testing main effects for each social skill and the respective interaction terms with harm/care (HC) and authority/respect (AR).

	Emotional	Financial	Denial of Rights
Conversation and Social Confidence (CSC)	.086 (.219)	.135 (.209)	.139 (.112)
HC × CSC	.536 (.490)	.716 (.467)	.693 (.251)**
AR × CSC	-.507 (.394)	-.677 (.375)	-.560 (.202)**
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.141 (.026)	.171 (.050)	.331 (.106)***
Easiness of self-exposure (ESE)	.836 (.357)*	.648 (.354)	.514 (.189)**
HC × ESE	1.355 (.704)	.932 (.697)	1.030 (.372)**
AR × ESE	-1.513 (.741)*	-1.125 (.734)	-1.188 (.391)**
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.210 (.060)*	.177 (.035)*	.347 (.108)***
Self-expression of positive affect (PA)	.155 (.354)	-.045 (.347)	-.087 (.195)
HC × PA	-.147 (.688)	.078 (.673)	-.135 (.379)
AR × PA	.626 (.707)	.182 (.692)	.301 (.389)
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.142 (.028)	.127 (.008)	.230 (.013)*
Coping assertively with risk (CAR)	-.103 (.212)	-.141 (.200)	-.127 (.103)
HC × CAR	-.967 (.472)*	-1.119 (.445)*	-.893 (.230)***
AR × CAR	.871 (.379)*	1.030 (.357)**	.824 (.184)***
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.199 (.085)*	.243 (.125)**	.436 (.222)***
Defending interests and opinions (DIO)	.450 (.245)	.373 (.236)	.187 (.124)
HC × DIO	1.285 (.604)*	1.322 (.581)*	.983 (.306)**
AR × DIO	-.835 (.356)*	-.911 (.343)*	-.769 (.180)***
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.231 (.081)*	.241 (.099)**	.415 (.190)***
Giving and receiving praise (GRP)	.182 (.366)	.073 (.352)	.039 (.193)
HC × GRP	.832 (.51)	.868 (.490)	.640 (.270)*
AR × GRP	-.658 (.437)	-.775 (.420)	-.594 (.231)*
$R^2 (\Delta R^2)$	.163 (.046)	.178 (.060)*	.307 (.095)**

Note: All results controlled for Harm/care and Authority/respect

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$