

Jordan I. Kosberg (ed.) (2007). *Abuse of Older Men*. New York: Haworth Press, 202 pp.
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The book *Abuse of Older Men* represents a real turnaround in our usual understanding of elder abuse. Findings from various research studies and the majority of literature from all countries highlight that older women, generally and historically, are more likely to be presented as victims of maltreatment, whereas older men are more likely to be presented as abusers. In such a context, a notion of domestic violence in terms of a powerful male perpetrator in his societal and family network clearly emerges. At the same time, social and cultural norms still remain as strong barriers, hindering the recognition of male victims of abuse because of the usual socially constructed consideration of gender, where by nature women are considered pacific and men violent.

Nevertheless, recent surveys show that both genders experience elder abuse though it may differ in terms of the types of violence experienced. In this respect, the book *Abuse of Older Men*, entirely dedicated to this specific theme with a multidisciplinary approach and interestingly achieved by collecting scientific contributions from different backgrounds – criminology, psychology, health and social care – represents a crucial and positive expansion of elder abuse literature. The ten chapters included in this anthology indeed highlight abuse as a health and social problem,

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reviewing different typologies of mistreatment and showing that violence towards men is often greatly under-investigated and under-theorized.

The book covers a broad range of topics. The two initial chapters are of great importance because they highlight that some crucial types of mistreatment, such as intimate partner violence (Reeves et al.) and sexual abuse (Teaster et al.) cross both genders, thus offering new cultural and societal interpretations of these dramatic types of violence. The authors of the other chapters are from ancillary professions, drawing for instance upon data on experiences of family doctors (Yaffe et al.) identified through a systematic English language literature review. General practitioners in particular, because of their frequent contacts with older citizens, may have the concrete possibility of tackling episodes of elder abuse and of reporting cases to Adult Protective Services. Nevertheless, these community resources are often under-used by older men who are victims of abuse (Blundo & Bullington). The social construction of manhood and cultural male stoicism are indeed crucial factors for understanding the reasons that prevent older men who are abused from seeking assistance, even though they also need support and protection. Other contributions highlight older men as subjects needing specific treatments from clinicians, and recommendations for helping male victims through structured and dedicated clinical services are made (Kaye et al.). Moreover, the existence of "gendered policies and practices that increase older men's risk of elder mistreatment" (Thompson et al.) is underscored to analyse the abuse of male seniors as a societal problem and not only as an individual or family question. Another interesting chapter (Stratton & Moore) focuses on the effects of past, poor and "fractured" relationships between older males and their family members as potential driving forces towards episodes of mistreatment, with the consequence of an increased risk for abandonment and neglect of elderly men. Finally, some articles and media accounts from 1986 to 2007 also report cases of older men who are victims of economic exploitation, apart from the violence from family and institutional carers (McNeely & Cook).

Worthy of note is the contribution from Jacki Pritchard, the only one from the United Kingdom (whereas the remaining nine are based on evidence from the United States), who presents results from a further development of an earlier study which originally focused on older women

victims of violence. During the project, some older men approached the researchers to report their experiences of being mistreated in childhood and adulthood, and this circumstance convinced the scientists to extend the study to include male victims, who surprisingly were willing to talk about this important and sensitive issue.

Conversely, an oddity of the volume concerns a chapter on osteoporosis (Haas & Moore), a pathology of the musculoskeletal system presented as one of the main factors of mortality and morbidity in the United States. It is analyzed here as a silent, invisible, and “neglected disease of elderly men”, whereas usually osteoporosis is studied and perceived as a specific female problem. Although this part shows the important issue of neglect in the health care field, it seems to be less correlated with the main and wider topic of the volume.

Besides its multiple strengths, the book also presents some shortcomings because of the various definitions and descriptions of elder abuse and neglect used by different authors (e.g. a general definition of violence is drawn from the HCR-20 items checklist in Reeves et al.; Stratton & Moore adopted the main forms of abuse as they are described by the National Center on Elder Abuse). Moreover, categories of abuse are often just listed but only seldom specified in their characteristics, and different ages for identifying the elderly are considered (e.g. 60 years and older in Blundo & Bullington; from 65 years onwards in Pritchard). Despite the awareness that both definitions of old age and mistreatment vary across cultures and among researchers, thus making it complex to reach a uniform and shared understanding of elder abuse, the inclusion of some specifications in the introduction of the book concerning these objective difficulties could have been explanatory and of great help in approaching the issue. Finally, to integrate the various perspectives, it would have been useful to include a final chapter with a global look to the future, crossing all the contributions of the book, and including (as separately made in some chapters only) recommendations for further studies and interventions.

Despite the aforementioned few limitations, the contents of the book provide researchers, educators, practitioners and students with crucial information useful for social work, nursing and Adult Protective Services dealing with episodes of violence against elderly men. As can be read on the back cover of the book, it can help to “learn the causes of – and

consequences from – elder abuse of men”, also by indicating new gendered directions and a wider perspective to the common understanding of elder abuse, thereby raising awareness about violence against older men. The book, which also has been co-published as a special edition of the *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect* (2007, 19 (1/2)), clearly highlights that men are subject to elder abuse just like women, but it also clearly acknowledges that older abused men may need different health and social interventions. It thus represents an important starting point for further and more specific studies on the issue, and the effort of Kosberg, in considering and highlighting it, shows a great sensitivity of this author in perceiving the social world around him, which in a global context is difficult to understand without assuming a gender perspective.