

Elder Abuse: Extent of the Problem

- The elderly population is nearing 40 million and is expected to increase to 70 million by 2030. The 85 and older population, the most likely to suffer abuse, is expected to grow from 4.6 to 9.6 million by 2030 (Administration on Aging, 2003).
- Similar to other crimes, elder abuse victims were often abused by someone known to them, with 36,000 non-lethal offenses and 500 murders committed by friends and family members annually. This reveals that between 1992 and 1997 elderly murder victims were twice as likely as victims between ages 12 and 59 to be killed by a relative or intimate (Klaus, 2000, p. 15).
- Most elder abuse victims (including offenses not reported to the police) are female (67.3%), with a near even split on the sex of perpetrators (47.4% male and 48.9% female).
- In the case of elder abuse, the data has a greater potential to underreport abuse because the Bureau of Justice Statistics does not survey people in nursing homes and does not measure fraud. This means that millions (nearly 10%) of the elderly who are most vulnerable to victimization are not included in the BJS data because they are living in some sort of supportive housing (Administration on Aging, 2003, p. 5).
- The Bureau of Justice Statistics (Klaus, 2000, p. 25) analysis indicates that only about half of the violent crimes and just over a third of property crimes are reported to police.
- The National Center on Elder Abuse demonstrates the steady increase in reports of domestic elder abuse from 1986 (117, 000 reports) to 1996 (293,000 reports) (Tatara and Kuzmeskus, 1997a). This increase represents a 150% growth in elder abuse reports during that period. In 2000, there were 472,813 reports of abuse, including both elders and adults with disabilities (Teaster, n.d.).