

News Release

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Financial exploitation costly, still difficult to prove, new ODHS study shows

Salem, OR — Family members, or those in a close, trusted relationship, are responsible for nearly half of substantiated financial exploitation cases of older adults in Oregon and the success of all investigations often depends on access to records and involvement of law enforcement, according to a study by the Oregon Department of Human Services Office of Aging and People with Disabilities.

Financial exploitation and neglect are tied for the lowest survivability rate of all abuse types and at least 13 percent of the victims in this study had to immediately seek some sort of governmental benefit as the result of the abuse. This included Medicaid to cover the cost of residential care and property tax deferral, energy as well as utility and food assistance.

These findings are part of a comprehensive study of financial exploitation of older adults in Oregon. The study is a follow up to Oregon's 2014 retrospective study on financial exploitation and helps provide a better understanding and picture today of financial abuse in Oregon.

The study contains analysis of financial exploitation from more than 600 cases investigated statewide in 2019. Staff reviewed these cases while documenting what has changed, what has stayed the same, where did interventions applied after 2014 work and where is focused effort still needed.

Some of the other findings include:

- In 2019, there were 4,152 investigations of alleged financial exploitation in Oregon conducted by the ODHS Office of Aging and People with Disabilities. This report pulls from some of those cases. In the 2014 report, 400 cases of the 2,929 reports involving financial exploitation were reviewed.
- Family members and others that are in a close trusted relationship with the victim continue to be the highest percentage of perpetrators using means of undue influence, deceit and threats to steal from the victim.

- The average quantifiable loss to a victim in this year's report was \$16,905. In 2014, the average loss per each substantiated case of monetary theft was \$24,915.
- The tools that the legislature has given financial institutions to limit losses are working, including the passing and implementation of House Bill 2622 in 2017. This has given these institutions a tool to very quickly stop the financial losses on some of these cases.
- There are many other losses to victims such as personal property, unauthorized credit card use, and medication that can be more difficult to quantify financially.
- Victims are more often women than men by nearly a 2:1 margin.
- The average age for both alleged and confirmed victims of abuse is 75.9 and 77 respectively. In 2013, the average age for a confirmed victim of financial exploitation was also 77.
- Financial institutions and case managers are the most frequent reporters of financial exploitation making up more than a third of all reports received and subsequently investigated.
- Bankers are not only well positioned to identify financial exploitation, but they often identify other types of abuse and self-neglect as well. In 2019, they reported more than 200 other concerns that were investigated including 150 cases of possible self-neglect and multiple cases of physical and verbal abuse.

While there still is a lot of outreach to be done, progress is being made through education and outreach to financial partners and law enforcement stakeholders. The ODHS Office of Aging and People with Disabilities has teamed up with these stakeholders to continue to make an impact on this issue.

The primary barrier to investigating these cases thoroughly and effectively continues to be the inability of investigators to obtain necessary financial records.

“Financial exploitation has a major impact on older adults, especially those who may be isolated or lack social support systems,” said Marie Cervantes, ODHS Adult Protective Services Administrator. “This publication offers updated findings so that

we may more closely examine this very costly, prevalent, and disturbing form of abuse of our most vulnerable Oregonians.”

Mike McCormick, interim director of the ODHS Office of Aging and People with Disabilities added, “With the aging demographics here in Oregon and nationally, financial exploitation is unfortunately forecast to grow. It’s critical that we, as a society, devote all the tools and resources to protect vulnerable adults from exploitation.”

Resources:

To read the study in its entirety, go to: [Financial Exploitation in Oregon: A Look at Community Based Investigations During 2019](#)

Experts available for interviews:

- Billie McNeely, State Elder Financial Exploitation Specialist, ODHS, APD, Adult Protective Services
- Rebecca Feters, Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Coordinator, ODHS, APD, Adult Protective Services

