

## Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Educate your congregation, friends, family by sharing this resource.

## About General Board of Church and Society



The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) is the social justice agency of The United Methodist Church. GBCS has headquarters on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City.

The message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ binds us together as a people and sends us forth to bring healing in the midst of strife, justice in the midst of brokenness, and love in the midst of hate.

Our purpose is to relate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the church and society to bring human life, resources and world relationships into conformity with the will of God.

### Educate. Empower. Engage.

Part of the Christian faith is to live out social holiness. For more information on Domestic Violence or other social justice concerns, visit [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org) or contact:

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## Sources & Credits

- \* Images courtesy of Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church
- \* Power Wheel courtesy of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project [www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

# Domestic Violence

## An Old-Age Problem



*Rise in the presence of the  
aged, show respect for the  
elderly and revere your God.*

*Leviticus 19:32*





*“Where can I go?  
They are my family.”*

**Robert, age 77, lives with his two sons**, ages 46 and 47. Both sons are unemployed and not interested in working. Robert has been beaten several times by one or the other.

“Sometimes,” Robert says, “I ask myself, ‘Why me?’”

Currently recovering from a beating, Robert tells a social services officer from the Minneapolis Police Department that he didn’t sign a complaint because he feared a more severe beating. “But when I get in the house,” he declares, “that’s it. I’m leaving.”

The officer first met Robert in a hospital emergency room. That time Robert required stitches for a beating he received for using his son’s towel.

Robert’s sons use his Social Security and pension income for themselves.

Finally, Robert presses charges. The sons post bond, and he drops the charges. “I don’t want to see them put away,” he says.

The officer asks why Robert stays with his sons. “I’m 77,” he responds. “Where can I go? They are my family.”

Months later, following another beating and three-day hospitalization, Robert walks through his old neighborhood with the officer. Robert reminisces about his sons’ childhood and thinks about what would have been his upcoming 50th wedding anniversary. Robert says that when his sons go out, he is forced to stay in the house because they leave him without spending money.

After many vows to leave, Robert returns to live with his sons. The officer encourages Robert to get help before he is hurt further and permanently. Robert promises to visit a local senior center “when the weather improves.”

## ‘Granny Battering’: An Age-old Global Abuse

Robert’s story reflects an age-old paradigm: abuse, mistreatment and exploitation of older people. First described in the United Kingdom in 1975 as “granny battering,” elder abuse affects millions of older people. Historically a problem in so-called developed nations, elderly abuse has become an increasing behavior in developing countries due to ageing populations, major rural-urban movement and breaking of traditional family bonds.

Official data about abuse of the elderly is rare in most countries, including the United States. The 1 to 2 million estimated cases in the United States are seen as only the tip of the iceberg. For every reported case, authorities estimate 12 are unreported. And, for each case of elder abuse, 30 child abuse cases are reported, which exacerbates any agency’s ability to respond to the former.

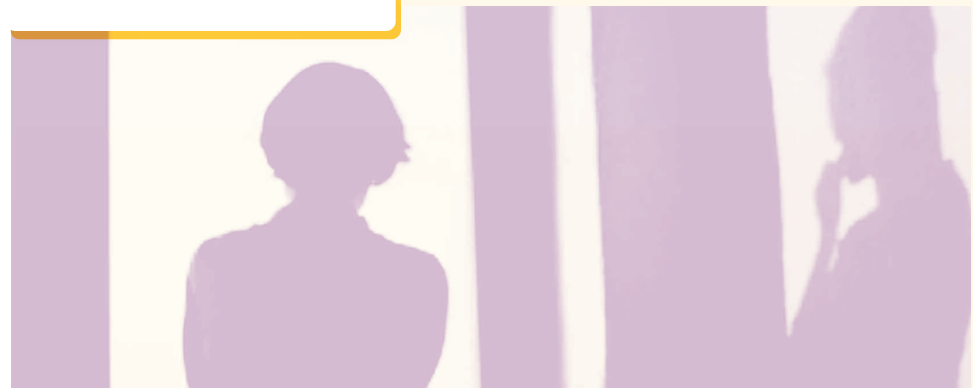
Most reports of elder abuse involve hired caretakers in nursing homes or other facilities. The vast majority of elder caretakers, though, are adult children, spouses and other family members.

Statistics indicate women are still the majority of abused elders, but the gender gap is narrowing.

Over the past few decades, increasing concern for human rights, gender equality and domestic violence has brought elder abuse closer to the top of the international agenda, but not close enough.

*Most reports of elder abuse involve hired caretakers in nursing homes or other facilities.*

Response to elder abuse varies widely. Developed and some emerging countries usually have strong laws addressing elder abuse. But having a strong law does not mean it is enforced. Even in the United States, no federal law prohibits elder abuse. Furthermore, in many countries social service safety nets do not exist.





# Domestic Violence

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### The Power Wheel™

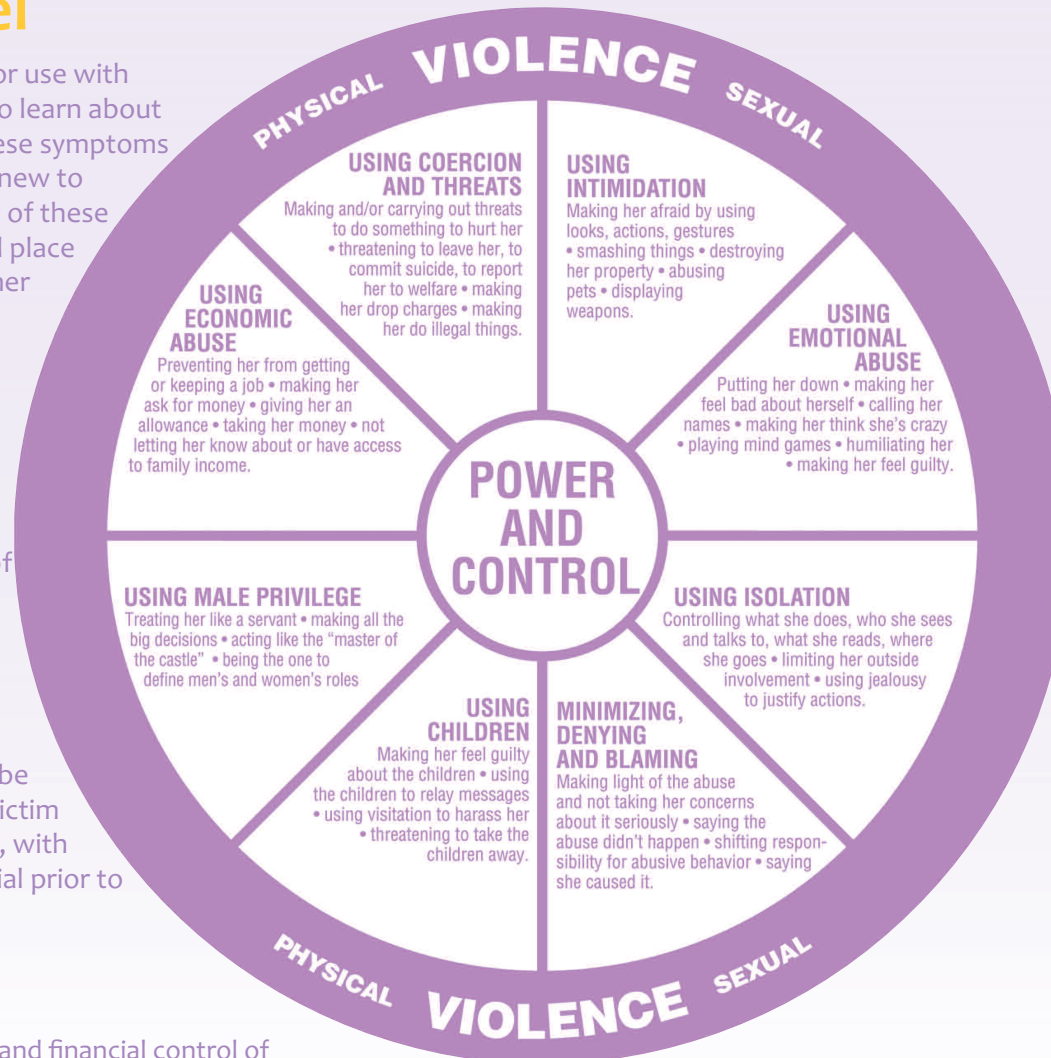
The power wheel is a teaching tool for use with individuals or small groups wanting to learn about the dynamics related to abuse. These symptoms of physical and sexual abuse may be new to discussion participants. Asking if any of these points are a surprise might be a good place to begin with a discussion group. Other questions could be:

- What societal/cultural messages about men and women contribute to unhealthy behaviors related to abuse?
- How can the church be a positive force in the prevention of elder abuse?
- How has the church perpetuated or been silent about domestic violence?

Talking about domestic violence can be difficult especially if one has been a victim or perpetrator. Creating a safe place, with confidentiality agreements, is essential prior to any discussion.

### Hidden in Plain Sight

Individuals often lose physical, mental and financial control of their lives as they age. As a result, their dependency on others



### Honor Thy Mother and Father

The fifth commandment tells us to "Honor thy Father and thy Mother." The Psalms and Proverbs make frequent references to the "hoary head" as the "beauty of old men" and a "crown of glory."

Although elder abuse is sometimes calculating and intentional, caring for an elderly parent, spouse or close relative can be time-consuming, budget-breaking, isolating and thankless. Families are filled with jealousies and resentments for childhood grievances, real and perceived. Senior services are few and costly. Frustration, exhaustion, anger and resentment can also lead day by day and little by little to abuses by a caretaker.

increases, which makes them ready targets for mistreatment and exploitation. What's more, elders may not be missed when they don't appear in public.

Social and cultural norms reinforce this vulnerability. In the West, media glorification of youth dismisses the elderly as helpless and disposable. In emerging economies, such as China, Brazil and India, tension between traditional and new family structures undercuts respect of young people for their elders. In sub-Saharan Africa the escalation of rural-urban migration destroys close bonds between generations.

The elderly, like other domestic abuse survivors, suffer physical, sexual and emotional violence. Even minor injuries can cause serious and irrevocable damage. In addition, they endure manipulation or misuse of their money, and perhaps most common of all, neglect.

Compounding the problem, domestic abuse of the elderly can be hidden easily. It is often hard to identify or distinguish from self-neglect, mental or physical deterioration related to illness or ageing. It can be easy to justify: "She doesn't eat anyway, and just wastes all the food I give her." "He doesn't even know I'm there, and never says thank you. He dirties himself as soon as I clean him up." "He's going to die soon anyway."

The elderly survivor is less likely to report abuse by a family member. "It's my family and I don't want to get them in trouble." "I'm afraid it will only get worse." "I was a lousy parent and deserve this." And like Robert, many will say, "I'll do something about it when the weather improves."

## What the Church Says

### The United Methodist Social Principles

We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms — verbal, psychological, physical, sexual — is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the church to provide a safe environment, counsel and support for the victim. While we deplore the action of the abuser, we affirm that person to be in need of God's redeeming love.

¶ 161.H (2008 Book of Discipline)

The United Methodist Church affirms the sacredness of all persons and their right to safety, nurture and care. It names domestic violence and sexual abuse as sins and pledges to work for their eradication. The church commits itself to listen to the stories of battered spouses, rape victims, abused children, adult survivors of child sexual abuse, and all others who are violated and victimized.

The church further commits itself to provide leadership in responding with justice and compassion to the presence of domestic violence and sexual abuse among its membership and within the community at large.

2008 Book of Resolutions, "Violence Against Women and Children"

## Ways You Can Take Action

### The Church is a Voice for Action

The church must speak out against domestic abuse and help survivors. When it does, the church is a clear voice for action.

Steps to take can include:

- Ensure your church is welcoming and physically accessible to older adults.
- Post and widely distribute materials including contacts for domestic violence hotlines and other local and national resources.
- Incorporate the topic of elder abuse in sermons, making clear the church's position. Encourage family members, neighbors and friends who suspect or know of domestic abuse to come forward.
- Provide education and training for clergy and laity on abuse prevention, detection and intervention.
- Provide counseling for survivors, their families and people at risk.
- In the United States, advocate for the ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Create and nurture men's and women's groups to raise awareness of the stresses in their own families and issues that are risk factors for abuse.
- Organize forums, inviting outside speakers, including survivors, abusers and representatives of local and national organizations to facilitate discussions and encourage congregants to come forth about their own risk status.
- Encourage congregant volunteers to organize and run support groups and forums.