

I am delighted to have been invited to speak to you all today about the range of research and evaluation projects that have been funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research arm of the Department of Justice (DOJ). In collaboration with the Civil Division of DOJ, NIJ has made grant awards in 10 of the past 11 years. Since 2005, NIJ has funded over 30 projects, for a total investment of approximately \$13 million. NIJ's research in the area of elder mistreatment has been organized around six research themes – 1) research on forensic markers; 2) evaluation of interventions; 3) research on incidence, prevalence, and risk factors; 4) tool development for practitioners; 5) financial exploitation; and 6) elder mistreatment in residential care facilities.

NIJ has established a research program that specifically focuses on the issue of elder mistreatment to assist the field in its response to the current and emerging needs of the elderly population. Many of the priorities identified in NIJ solicitations have come from the National Research Council's 2003 landmark publication *Elder Mistreatment: Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation in an Aging America* and subsequent interdisciplinary meetings with researchers and practitioners in the field.

The funded grants are examining or have examined diverse elder mistreatment issues, including the identification of factors that put elderly individuals at risk for abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation; the exploration of the long term health and mental health effects of elder mistreatment; measurement of incidence and prevalence of abuse, including mistreatment in residential care facilities and resident-on-resident abuse; documentation of bruising, pressure ulcers, and other physical injuries as they relate to abuse, neglect, and care; examination of forensic technologies in the detection of elder abuse; exploration of the factors that promote reporting and facilitate investigation of elder abuse; evaluation of the forensic center model;

production of screening and assessment tools for financial exploitation; development of screening tools for use in Emergency Departments and by EMTs; and calculating the costs of elder abuse.

The largest, most comprehensive and most commonly cited statistics on the prevalence of elder mistreatment experienced by elderly individuals living in the community comes from the NIJ-funded National Elder Mistreatment Study (NEMS), a nationally representative study of nearly 6,000 U.S. residents ages 60 and older. The results indicated that 11 percent of elders reported experiencing at least one form of mistreatment – emotional, physical, sexual or potential neglect – in the past year. Financial exploitation by a family member was reported by 5 percent of elders.¹ In 2014, NIJ funded a five year follow-up of the original victims identified in the 2009 NEMS study, plus a matched sample of participants who did not report any past year victimization in the original NEMS study. The follow-up study will provide the field with the information about the physical health, mental health, social service utilization, and criminal justice outcomes for victims of elder abuse.

Early NIJ-funded research on forensic markers documented bruising patterns among abused elderly individuals and found that abused elders were able to explain the cause of their bruises and that the bruises on abused elders were large and commonly found on their head, neck or torso.² Another NIJ-funded forensic marker project is underway that will compare elderly victims of physical abuse to a matched sample of non-abused older adults to document a broader

¹ Acierno, R., Hernandez, M. A., Amstadter, A. B., Resnick, H. S., Steve, K., Muzzy, W., & Kilpatrick, D. G. (2010). Prevalence and correlates of emotional, physical, sexual, and financial abuse and potential neglect in the United States: The National Elder Mistreatment Study. *American Journal of Public Health, 100* (2), 292.

² Wigglesworth, A., Austin, R., Corona, M., Schneider, D., Liao, S., Gibbs, L., & Mosqueda, L. (2009). Bruising as a marker of physical elder abuse. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 57* (7), 1191-1196.

spectrum of injuries seen in physical elder abuse cases and will identify which forensic markers of physical abuse are most associated with prosecution.

Despite the proliferation of elder abuse multidisciplinary teams, there has been little research evaluating the effectiveness of this approach on case outcomes. NIJ has funded two elder Forensic Center evaluations. The evaluation of the Los Angeles Forensic Center examined outcomes related to prosecution of financial elder abuse cases and protection of vulnerable older adults. They found that significantly more cases reviewed by the Forensic Center were submitted to the District Attorney's Office (22.0 percent) compared with APS-only cases (3.0 percent)³ and that significantly more FC cases were referred to the Office of the Public Guardian (30.6 percent) compared with APS-only cases (5.9 percent).⁴ The second evaluation study is an ongoing randomized control trial of a new Forensic Collaborative in Denver.

Over the past several years, NIJ has increased its investment in research on financial exploitation. NIJ's growing interest in financial exploitation was motivated, in part, by a groundbreaking NIJ-funded study that explored a database of all substantiated cases of elder abuse in the state of VA over a 2-year period (N=2,142) to determine the differences between cases where an elderly person was the victim of financial exploitation only and those where he or she was the victim of both financial exploitation and neglect or physical abuse, a combination referred to as hybrid financial exploitation.⁵ This study paved the way for additional NIJ-funded

³ Navarro, A. E., Gassoumis, Z. D., & Wilber, K. H. (2013). Holding abusers accountable: An elder abuse forensic center increases criminal prosecution of financial exploitation. *The Gerontologist*, 53(2), 303-312.

⁴ Gassoumis, Z. D., Navarro, A. E., & Wilber, K. H. (2015). Protecting victims of elder financial exploitation: The role of an Elder Abuse Forensic Center in referring victims for conservatorship. *Aging and Mental Health*, 19, 790-798.

⁵ Jackson, S. L., & Hafemeister, T. L. (2011). Risk factors associated with elder abuse: The importance of differentiating by type of elder maltreatment. *Violence and Victims*, 26(6), 738-757.

research on financial exploitation because it highlighted the link between financial exploitation and other forms of abuse. One of NIJ's notable contributions to the study of elder financial exploitation was the development of the Older Adult Financial Exploitation Measure (OAFEM).⁶ The full 79-item OAFEM measure and a shortened 30-item version, have been validated and used in numerous research projects and by APS agencies in Illinois.

These are just a few examples of the dozens of projects that NIJ has supported since 2005. Despite incremental progress in elder abuse research over the past decade, there remains a dearth of knowledge about many aspects of elder abuse. Particularly noteworthy is the lack of evaluation research on prevention efforts. NIJ has an open solicitation requesting proposals to develop and test preventive interventions derived from models that have been demonstrated to be effective in related fields. NIJ is also interested in expanding our work in tribal communities to include research on elder abuse.

⁶ Conrad, K. J., Iris, M., Ridings, J. W., Langley, K., & Wilber, K. H. (2010). Self-report measure of financial exploitation of older adults. *The Gerontologist*, 50(6), 758-773.