Reviewer’s report

Title: Family caregiver mistreatment of the elderly. Prevalence of risk and associated factors in a Spanish population

Version: 0 Date: 08 Jul 2017

Reviewer: Mark Yaffe

Reviewer’s report:

This paper aims to address an under-researched issue, namely elder abuse. It more specifically plans to look at prevalence of risk of care giver abuse in a Spanish population. Prevalence data looking at various aspects of elder abuse has been highly variable and therefore this paper can make an important contribution to the existing literature.

Strengths of the paper include:

* Concise and well-written
* Large sample size
* Use of appropriate instruments (with one possible exception---see below) to assess targeted variables
* Appropriate statistics, with results clearly described.
* Comprehensive references

Areas that should be addressed:

1. The title of the paper is not specific enough. It talks about caregiver abuse, but the paper addresses only one form of caregiver, namely the family caregiver. I recommend adding the word family to the title since its omission is not a minor one in the field of elder abuse.

2. Also the title says "prevalence", when the study addressed not prevalence of elder abuse, but prevalence of risk of abuse. Therefore the word risk should be in the title.

3. Finally, there may be a grammatical error in the title: " caregiver abuse in the elderly should be caregiver abuse of the elderly.

4. Abstract, lines 32-36: the information in this background section should likely appear within a separate section labelled Objectives.
5. Line 42 refers to evaluation of social support, and this should be more specific to indicate whether is support for the caregiver or the care recipient.

6. Lines 52-55 in abstract and later in discussion it is stated that risk factors are "preventable to an extent...". This statement raises two concerns: is this reference to primary or secondary prevention of elder abuse - a distinction important with elder abuse? Second, in the elder abuse literature the link between individual risk factors and appearance of elder abuse is often tenuous. As well, there is some literature that suggests that a specific risk factor may only be a risk factor for one specific category of abuse. Perhaps more concise wording could be used in the abstract conclusion, and in the discussion / implications a few sentences devoted to what is meant by prevention.

7. Line 59: "this type of violence..." EA is not always violent (eg financial).

8. Line 60-61: categories of abuse are listed, followed by "serious loss of dignity and respect". The latter is an outcome of EA, not a category of abuse, and likely needs to be stated as such.

9. L65: "...inflicted ...by society". It is not clear whether the term society means that anyone in society can inflict abuse; or is society a reference to systemic or institutional issues. If it is the latter it is likely not appropriate in this sentence since systemic or institutional abuse is treated in the EA abuse as a distinct entity from EA inflicted by a person in a position of trust.

10. L66: 'abuse is frequently perpetuated .....by person recipients trust". The WHO definition of EA is that the abuse has to occur by someone in a position of trust. If one accepts that definition then the word "frequently" is inappropriate, and should be removed.. There is growing discussion in some EA research people about the assumption that it has to be a person of trust, but it might be safer not to get into this debate and just remove the word "frequently:.

11. L82: "of to 47%".....a word or words may be missing here.

12. L103: A statement would be helpful as to why family caregivers are targeted to the exclusion of others, e.g, friends, paid caregivers, etc.

13. L103: Dependency is a likely risk factor, but why limit to moderate to severe dependency? Indeed, in L185-186 you note that total dependency was found in your study as being at lower abuse risk than those moderately abused. So, one wonders where mild dependency appears on the continuum---or maybe the relationship is not linear but an inverted U shaped curve. It might be interesting to speculate about this in the discussion.

14. L107: analyses should be analysed.
15. L147-148: The questionnaire that was developed ad hoc should be in an Appendix so that the readership can examine it. It does not mention that this questionnaire was validated and therefore the question arises as to why it was necessary to develop questions for this purpose when other short validated tools have been recommended by the American Centers for Medicare and Medicaid for use in the community (EASI available in Spanish, HE-EAST, and VASS).

16. Arising from #15, Table 1 suggests that 404/829 (48.7%) had 1 or more positive responses on your questionnaire. So, your tool suggested ½ people self-reported abuse; a figure hard to comprehend. This is an important finding to comment on given that self-report on a screener is the common way of doing prevalence studies.

17. L199-210: you have explained why your findings differ on the basis of divergence between studies, but I think you need to be a bit more specific. Firstly, you were looking at risk prevalence, the American studies were not ---it is logical that risk values should be higher. Secondly you excluded low dependency seniors, when others didn't. Thirdly, you restricted your study to family caregivers, which many prevalence studies have not done. If you had included these other types of caregivers your total denominator would have been larger and this might have dropped the % at risk for abuse.

18. L205-206: you cite the WHO findings of up to 25% prevalence of abuse of those with high dependency; this seems to contradict your finding discussed in lines 185-186. Can you comment on the implications of this?

19. The addressing of the issues above should help advance the appearance of this strong research.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.
I am able to assess the statistics

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In my feedback I make reference to three tools that the American Centers for Medicare and Medicaid recommend for use in detection of elder abuse. I was the PI on a team that developed and validated one of the tools (available on a dedicated on-line website).

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