Elder Abuse in the African Community in Regional Australia

Ndungi Wa Mungai*, **Ilonka Guse, John Moi**

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University, Australia
*Corresponding Author: nmungai@csu.edu.au

Abstract The aim of this study is to establish whether elder abuse is an issue of concern for the African community in rural New South Wales. A teaching case methodology is used to explore the phenomenon. This methodology has been identified as an appropriate method to use when there is limited data available. Using two teaching cases, we demonstrate how the breakdown in cultural practices could leave the elderly at risk of abuse. We also demonstrate that this problem is often hidden from the general community. Lack of English language and isolation increases the vulnerability of the elderly. Cultural practices and norms in the culture of origin provided the basis for protection and support for the elderly. Urbanization and migration lessens the protection and support provided by cultural practices and norms as these breakdown and this places the elderly at greater risk. This article highlights the importance of understanding cultures in transition and of upholding the human rights of vulnerable groups. The article recommends more detailed studies of the phenomenon of elder abuse in this community, as well as the general refugee and immigrant communities. Such studies would explore the extent of the problem and possible solutions.

Keywords Elder Abuse, Ageing, Teaching Case, Refugee, African, Human Rights, Social Work

Introduction

This exploratory study attempts to raise the awareness of elder abuse in the small but growing African community in regional New South Wales. It is a phenomenon where there is virtually no information and one that needs to be researched more thoroughly in future. The study makes use of teaching cases to demonstrate some of the issues involved.

The definition of elder abuse places emphasis on the breach of trust which results in the elder person being negatively affected:

Elder abuse is a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an elder person (WHO, 2008, P.6).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) regards elder abuse as "a violation of human rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, lost productivity, isolation and despair "(P.29). Everyone is entitled to feel safe and secure under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR guarantees that 'everyone has a right to life, liberty and security of person' (Article 4) It is also envisaged that 'no one shall be subjected to torture, or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment' (Article 5). It is clear therefore that elderly people, like everyone else, are entitled to be treated in ways that do not threaten their safety or dignity.

Like all stages in life there are challenges old age and the issue of elder abuse has been recognized as an important issue for all societies in the world. It is certainly recognized as a significant issue for social work and other frontline workers in Australia and New Zealand (Cairns & Vreugdenhil, 2014; Naughtin & Schofield, 2013). There is no universally agreed-upon instrument to measure elder abuse or maltreatment but there are some working definitions (Sherman, Rosenblatt, & Antonucci, 2011). In general terms, elder abuse is understood to include acts of violence or mistreatment committed intentionally or unintentionally by people in a position of trust to the elderly person. Definitions also describe types of abuse that include physical, sexual, psychological, financial and neglect (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). The location of abuse is also important and may be perpetuated at home or in an institution.

Johannesen and LoGiudice (2013) have elaborated on the terms used in elder abuse. Physical abuse refers to use of physical force to force compliance as well as non-accidental acts that cause physical pain or injury. Sexual abuse implies exploitative sexual acts without consent that may include touching, rape and use of language that may be regarded to be sexual in nature and unwanted. Psychological abuse means acts that cause mental stress and threatening acts that cause fear, violence, isolation, deprivation and feelings of shame and powerlessness. Financial abuse applies to illegal use of an elder person's finances as well as mismanagement

of their money, property or other resources. Neglect refers to the failure of the responsible person to cater for life necessities as well as not allowing others to do so

These definitions reflect the evolving values and sensibilities of most western social and legal understanding of elder abuse. It is also recognized that there is need to have awareness of elder abuse in other cultures (Sherman et al., 2011). In the developing countries the studies are limited but there is clear indication of widespread prevalence of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of older persons (WHO, 2008).

In the western culture, being young or youthful is generally equated with beauty and it is celebrated while old age is viewed as disability and has low status (Lee & Gupta, 2011; Lippa, 2007; Morgan, 1991). This negative view of old age is what is regarded as ageism. In the United States, for example, ageism in the media, in academia and social environment is perpetuated by depiction of older adults as being dependent, needy and people to be pitied (Lee & Gupta, 2011). The Chinese and other Asian Buddhist and Confucian cultures, on the other hand, have historically promoted a strong sense of family peace, dignity, honour, and respect for elders (Phillips, Ajrouch, & Hillcoat-Nalletamby, 2010; Sherman et al., 2011). This positive regard of elders is closer to the traditional African place for older members of the community.

Old age in the African societies is an important stage in life and one to be celebrated. Elders were venerated in traditional African societies and even when they died they were still assumed to play an important role as the 'living dead' (Mbiti, 1970). The elders are regarded as repositories of the community history, knowledge, secrets and culture in general and therefore key to the survival of the community. Schiele (2000) notes that infants and elders are the most privileged groups in the traditional African society. It is argued that both have close proximity to the spirit world by virtue of birth being arrival from there and death being entry into that world.

It is important to note that while this is ideal, there is evidence to show that with changing societies due to education, urbanization, industrialization and migration, these ideals may not be maintained in all circumstances (Phillips et al., 2010). On the other hand it is also shown that despite globalization, traditional cultural value systems and attitudes towards older adults still shape attitudes towards elders and elder abuse in different parts of the world (Sherman et al., 2011). What this means then is that we have to be aware of peoples' background while also paying attention to changing attitudes.

The elderly people in the cases used in this study live in Wagga Wagga (Wagga) in New South Wales Australia. Wagga is a rural town that is growing steadily as it attracts people from other parts of Australia and overseas. The latest estimate of the residents is 63,906 and a healthy growth rate of 1.6 percent (Martin, April 2012). The Africans arriving under refugee resettlement have been settling in Wagga from about 2005 and come from a range of countries including Sudan, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Liberia (Mungai, 2014). The term refugee has a specific meaning in the 1951 United Nations Refugees Convention where it refers to someone outside of their country and in fear of persecution if they return. While all refugees have experienced a degree of persecution, the experiences of each individual are different. Nsubuga-Kyobe (2004) noted the main settlement problems experienced by refugees in regional areas included: education and English language issues; intergenerational conflict and cultural gaps; unemployment, access to employment services and benefit payments; accommodation problems; understanding the system; and isolation and alienation.

For Wagga and similar rural and regional areas, the refugee immigrants appreciate the lifestyle and opportunities offered by rural areas but there are some difficulties including limited services compared to the metropolitan centres and the small size of the communities that fall below the critical mass for provision of some ethno-specific services (Gray, Dunn, Kelly, & Williams, 1991; Mungai, 2014). These services are likely to keep improving as the communities get bigger but it will also mean other people leaving to settle in metropolitan areas where services are more developed.

We begin with a review of the complex issues encountered in the resettlement of older people who have lived their early and middle lives in a different cultural environment and a forced by conflicts to seek refuge in a western country. The next section presents the methodology in the form of case studies explaining what teaching cases are and presenting two examples. This is followed by a discussion of the issues identified by the teaching cases. All methodologies have limitations and the limitations of teaching cases are discussed, before ending the article with a conclusion.

Issues for Older People

Resettlement experiences for older refugee immigrants are very different from those of the younger ones. Those who had spent most time in life in another culture and had established stable networks within their communities of origin, often struggle to adjust to their new community. They are challenged by their children who adjust at a faster rate to western ways and hence may experience intergenerational conflict and cultural disharmony (Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2004). While the traditional cultures dictated that the elders were venerated, they find that the western cultures their children are exposed to, do not operate like this. The changes in education and technology mean that the traditional knowledge and experience of the elders is less valued in the changed circumstances and their children's language skills, education and mastery of modern technology is more valued (Phillips et al., 2010). This makes the elders more vulnerable to abuse and neglect and at risk of low self-esteem as they are not valued in their new community.

The loss of power and authority puts the elders at risk of

elder abuse. World Health Organization/International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (2002) research across four continents, has shown that elder abuse is a widespread problem. It is hard to find precise data on the incidence of elder abuse because of the difficulties in definition in different cultures and the reluctance of the victims to report abuse as they could be dependent on the abuser and fear being removed from the home (Childs, Hayslip, Radika, & Reinberg, 2000). This makes assessment of elder abuse complex and calls for multiple factors to be taken into consideration while making assessment of the presence of elder abuse.

Elder abuse is widely recognised as an important issue with incidents likely to rise with the ageing population. When it is unresolved, sustained cases of abuse could result in premature death, hospitalization, nursing home placement, chronic pain, disability, bankruptcy and impaired mental health and physical health (Burnes, Rizzo, & Courtney, 2014). Those at high risk of abuse include elders with cognitive impairment, dementia, behaviour problems, mental illness, dependency in relationship, frailty or poor health, trauma or past abuse, living in poverty, from ethnic minority, isolation, drug and alcohol use (Sherman et al., 2011). Abused elder characteristics such as being female or young elder, are recognised as being more significant than the perpetrators' characteristics, but perpetrators characteristics are important in financial abuse where young people are more likely to be perpetrators against parents and grandparents (Burnes et al., 2014).

Why abuse occurs cannot be explained by a unified theory but a number of theories attempt to offer some explanation. It is therefore important to take into account individual, social and cultural aspects in a given situation. The range of explanations include individual psychology (for example alcoholism), interpersonal relationships, exchange theory (for example co-dependence), social historical theories and political and economic theory (Phillips et al., 2010). What would also be helpful is an intersectional approach that would explore how the various factors such as class, race, culture, gender and age interact and reinforce each other or what Phillips et al. refer to as looking at how multiple factors, considered in tandem, may provide the most informed understanding. Migrant elders may have additional disadvantages lacking savings, employment history and skills while refugee background may be associated with poor mental and physical health.

Methodology

A case is a description of a situation based on archival or observational data that is constructed to logically and sensitively present the situation under study. This study takes a qualitative exploratory approach to identify the issues relating to elder abuse. As a qualitative study, it is less concerned with the quantification of observations but instead presents examples that attempt to interpret what could be happening. In addition, the study aims to observe, reflect and interpret data and generate empathic understanding of the people being researched (Neuman, 2006). This is not to say that research that would help to quantify the cases of elder abuse is not helpful as indeed it would be, but this was not the objective of this particular study.

Case study social research method is well established as an empirical enquiry on contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context and is suitable for researching complex social issues and situations (Yin, 2009). Cases can also be used for teaching purposes. Teaching cases have been used in many disciplines that include social work, law, medicine, business and development economics in situations where they are used to aid the decision making process (Jones, 2003; Kim et al, 2006; Ŝtrach and Everett, 2008; Pitt & Watson, 2011). Yin (2009) suggests that one difference between research and teaching cases is that teaching case studies do not have to be concerned with rigorous and fair presentation of empirical data like case research cases. Normally, teaching cases describe either real or fictional situations relevant to the purpose they are used for.

Teaching cases are used both in teaching and research. The commonly used terms of teaching cases and research cases describe more the objective of the researcher's objective in applying the case method and the use of the cases in theory building than any difference in compiling the cases (Bonoma, 1985). In teaching, the cases can be used to highlight important issues or problems and help to develop problem-solving skills. They are used as an aid to understanding the complexities in a given situation and could come from real situations, composite scenarios from different studies or they could be fictional. The key to a good teaching case is believability and plausibility (Ŝtrach & Everett, 2008). In teaching, these cases can then be used by the audience to explore solutions to the demonstrated problems:

Teaching cases in business-related disciplines describe either real or made-up situations which should demonstrate the complexity of organizational life or application of certain theories to the decision making process. (Ŝtrach & Everett, 2008, p. 200).

In social research, teaching cases and case studies are used as an aid in solving social problems. The cases can be used to demonstrate or test models or theories in research (Ŝtrach & Everett, 2008). Accurate and rigorous data collected on the cases are required for such purposes. Cases are mostly suitable for exploratory, descriptive or interpretive approaches to social research (Yin, 1993). While cases attempt to present an existing situation, they are never based on representative samples and hence do not claim to be representative (Yin, 1993). They aim to provide a detailed scenario and the possibility of developing tentative theories. Teaching cases and research case studies share common aspects and can be interchangeable so research case studies can be used for teaching purposes and cases developed for teaching can be used for research purposes (Ŝtrach & Everett, 2008). A significant difference between teaching and

research cases is that teaching cases may not include complete or true description of actual events as data may be altered to better illustrate a point (Yin, 2009).

In this study the teaching cases have used real cases but changed identities and other details for the purposes of illustrating the problems being studied. In doing this, rigour was applied in the selection of the cases that were known to the authors to ensure that they were detailed and representative of the situation under study. Ethical conduct was also followed to ensure that the details were sufficiently disguised or altered so as not to be identifiable.

Jones (2003) explains that, in social work, teaching cases still have to be rigorous and well researched and developed to demonstrate cases that could be generalized. Jones also emphasizes that teaching cases need to be cases that are generalisable to other situations and are rigorously researched. In this study we took real cases but changed details to protect the identities of people involved and also took liberty to alter details to suit the case construction. King and Stevahn (2013) suggest that teaching cases are used in program evaluation to present situations or programs that are realistic without being real. In doing that, names and situations are mixed and matched to create composite cases based on the experience of the researchers.

Teaching Case 1: Financial Abuse: Samuel

Samuel is a 68 year old man from Sudan. He has a partner Judy, who is 62, one dependent teenage son and four adult children. Samuel cannot read or write and he suffers from back pains. He has been in Australia for four years. Neither Samuel nor his wife Judy has worked since arriving in Australia.

The elder abuse that Samuel has suffered is primarily *financial* abuse by his children. The two young adult children are a son and a daughter (20 and 18). Samuel had entrusted them to transact his financial affairs such as banking and paying bills. The children took advantage of this and diverted the money to their own personal use. Samuel only realized there was a problem when he got disconnection notices for utility bills. A social worker from a support agency worked with him to explain what that meant.

Samuel was very shocked to learn that he had been cheated by his own children. He had a payment plan set up as he owed a total of four thousand dollars and had to be paid over nine months.

He feels that if he was still in Africa he would have physically disciplined the children and sent them away to live with relatives. He feels powerless here as beating them would only put him in trouble with the law. Emotionally he feels bitter, powerless and betrayed.

Teaching Case 2: Mutual Abuse - George

George is a 53 year old man from South Sudan. He has a partner Monica, 53; two dependent teenage boys (15 and 17); two young adult sons (20, 22) and a daughter, Doris (26). George has lived in Australia for four years.

George suffers from a hip and back problem as a result of

torture before he came to Australia. He also suffers from insomnia. While there had been ongoing problems with the children not doing household chores, the crisis came with the serious falling out with Doris. Doris was initially supportive of the family and was the only one with a job. She had even considered saving and buying a house for the family. Doris, however, felt resentful that she was not accorded the respect due to being the provider that she was, by both parents and siblings.

One day the parents discovered that Doris was planning a wedding without informing them. When Doris was questioned about it she was unapologetic which the father regarded as rude and abusive and a physical confrontation ensued. She pushed the father down and he aggravated his back injury. The brothers joined the fight and chased her down the street.

George was very shocked at being physically assaulted by his daughter. In his culture that would have been a taboo. Her maternal uncles would have contributed a bull to be slaughtered so he would be appeased and she could be cleansed. Failure to do that would have risked a curse from the father which could leave her unable to have children of her own for the rest of her life. George felt further insulted when the daughter changed her surname after leaving home.

Findings and Discussion

A number of issues are highlighted by these cases. These include the unique disadvantages experienced by older refugees, issues of financial and physical abuse. In addition, there are issues of the positive and negative aspects of culture, the apparent early onset of old age and the importance of the helping role of social workers.

Disadvantages of Older Refugees

Samuel suffers multiple disadvantages that make him vulnerable to elder abuse. Being a new immigrant means that he does not understand how the various institutions work. His back problems and age mean his chances of finding employment are virtually non-existent. He is therefore fully dependent on his pension, which under normal circumstances is just enough to get by and therefore having to pay a debt, even with a payment plan, puts him under financial stress.

Samuel's experience fits the descriptions of elder abuse, as any pattern of behaviour which causes physical, psychological or financial harm to an older person in the context of a relationship of trust between the older person and the abuser (Cairns & Vreugdenhil, 2014). The abuser could be working in an institution, or could be, as in this case, a family member, and as Cairns and Vreugdenhil (2014) note, financial abuse is the most common form of abuse but is often not reported to authorities. The families in these cases are not refugees but come from refugee backgrounds. They have been resettled after being recognised as refugees. In general terms, refugees are forced to flee their homelands

due to human rights abuses. It is important therefore to ensure their human rights are upheld in the same as other Australians as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (Article 25).

While the families are not directly discriminated, there is need to recognise their special needs arising from the refugee background and provided them with necessary support if they are to enjoy equal rights.

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse is not the first issue that comes to mind when one thinks of elder abuse. Physical, sexual and psychological abuse is more easily recognisable. Financial abuse has been described as the most common form of elder abuse. It takes many forms including borrowing money without repaying, stealing, forcing an elderly person to give money or other assets (Wendt, Bagshaw, Zannettino, & Adams, 2015). Elderly migrants who have come from a background where they were not used to handling money or are illiterate, as in the case of Samuel, are particularly vulnerable. Financial issues were problematic in both teaching cases presented here. It is also clear that financial abuse is a complex matter with multiple dimensions including culture, gender and age that the helping professions need to be aware of (Wendt et al., 2015). Intergenerational issues in abuse are also evident and also raise the issue of location and dislocation. The other complexity with financial abuse is elderly parents may be reluctant to talk about it for fear that their children would go to jail or become violent towards them.

Physical Abuse

Doris pushing her father and exacerbating his back injury could be considered as physical abuse. Physical abuse of an elderly person is non-accidental use of force that results in physical pain, injury or impairment. This scenario does not explain whether Doris was the carer or not but she was a family member and felt responsible for the welfare of the whole family. Physical abuse is probably the earliest recognised form of elder abuse which was termed as 'granny bashing' by Baker (1975). It is a criminal offence in the United States (Payne, 2013). In Australia both physical and sexual abuse could constitute criminal acts while neglect and financial abuse may be harder to prosecute. The legal protection for rights of the elderly is found in both state police and federal government mechanisms (State of Victoria Department of Health, 2012).

There is not always a clear understanding between experts on what constitutes elder abuse. This lack of consensus makes prosecution problematic (Payne, 2013). The areas of contention are around whether one considers the intention to harm or just the resultant harm irrespective of intention. The case of George and Doris is complicated by cultural issues and the fact that they could both be considered perpetrators and victims. Culture and ethnicity are important in how different groups define elder abuse and how they address it (Moon, 2000). George had a culturally-based understanding of abuse. On the other hand Doris had a working life that would have exposed her more to the Australian culture and it is unclear how much she understood the concept of elder abuse, both in her culture of origin and in Australia. It is not unusual for young people to be unaware of such cultural and legal matters. Any social worker assisting the family would need to take these cultural issues of intergenerational disharmony into consideration.

Culture as an Asset and a Burden

Samuel felt that the African culture would have protected him in Africa as he had the right to discipline his son and daughter, and the social pressure would have discouraged them to do what they had done. In that sense, culture would have been a protective asset for him. Living in a different culture, he feels that his interests are not well protected and his son and daughter had taken advantage of that.

Social-cultural factors have been identified as critical in predicting the risk of elder abuse. The critical factors in this regards include family disharmony, strained relationships and low levels of social support (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). George's case is a good demonstration of family disharmony and strained relationships. Both families living in a small regional town lack the support of their extended families and it takes time to become familiar with all the available support services. George felt that cultural taboos would have protected him from having his authority challenged by his daughter. In his African culture organising a wedding is a community responsibility and the parents on both sides would normally have the final say. Had they been still in Africa, the clan would have rallied around him and applied sanctions against the daughter for going against this norm.

A key aspect of the African culture is the respect and honour for the elders of the tribe (Awoniyi, 2015). There is of course a risk of romanticizing the protective role of culture as there is evidence that in a number of traditional societies the parents are losing authority even without migrating (Phillips et al., 2010). The question of culture being oppressive towards women needs to be considered. In this case Doris felt marginalized and her contribution was not appreciated by her family that seemed to take it for granted. The challenge in working with the family and the community is to promote an intergenerational dialogue that considers the gender and cultural issues as well as the challenges and opportunities in their new place. Migrants often face the dilemma of negotiating the complexities arising from both diaspora identities and those of the culture of origin as well

as the class and gender issues that confront them (Dwyer, 2000). Respect of culture also needs to go hand in hand with respect for human rights so no one is oppressed in the name of culture.

Early Old Age

At the age of 53, George would not be considered old in Australia. The hardships he has experienced and his current health status mean he has the problems one would normally associate with old age such as physical frailty. In Australia old age is considered to begin at 65 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2013). This is the current age of pension entitlement but from July 2023 the qualifying age for pension will be raised to 67 years. It is also noteworthy that some groups such as the Indigenous people have a lower life expectation and experience issues associated with old age at an earlier age (Naughtin & Schofield, 2013). Disadvantages of early life, including disadvantages from country of origin, can exacerbate inequalities in old age.

The confrontation between George and his daughter could be considered as mutual abuse as both contributed to the tension and confrontation. From a cultural perspective, George considers himself the victim. It is also conceivable that had George not been in a frail state the daughter would not have had the courage to fight him, so his condition made him vulnerable. In the United States, physical abuse has been defined as physical force or violence that results in bodily pain, impairment or injury, by acquaintances, sons, daughters, grandchildren, spouse or partner caring for the elderly person (National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA), 2008). From an African and most other traditional cultural perspectives, a daughter fighting with her father is not expected under any circumstances. The Australian institutions, however, are more likely to view the issue from a feminist perspective and be more sympathetic to her as the one oppressed on the basis of gender.

There is clearly more to the case than elder abuse. The family is breaking down and is struggling to balance the cultural norms of Africa and the laws and norms in Australia. In traditional or collective cultures young people are expected to provide direct financial help to their parents as an automatic obligation (Sherman et al., 2011). George's daughter felt that she was an adult and could arrange her wedding without seeking the approval of her parents. Parents in different cultures would probably feel slighted by that but for George he is likely to experience it as further erosion of his authority in the family and add to his sense of despondency. It is therefore critical when working with a family in this situation to recognize both their traditional and changing values and circumstances that they find themselves in (Sherman et al., 2011).

Assisting the family to deal with the issues would require recognizing the cultural issues, health issues, unemployment issues, elder abuse issues, communication issues as well as gender issues. Social workers are aware and should promote

environmental factors that promote ageing well and maximize participation including: good housing, adequate income, affordable public transport and supportive social networks (Naughtin & Schofield, 2013). In the case of George, low income made him dependent on his daughter. Identifying a supportive network would have assisted in negotiating the intergenerational problems they were experiencing. Social workers providing interventions for both families before their problems reached crisis points, could have been beneficial.

The Role of Social Workers

The social worker explained to Samuel what his options were in dealing with his problems. Social workers are among the frontline workers assisting individuals and families dealing with cases of elder abuse. Cairns and Vreugdenhil (2014) found that frontline workers, including nurses and social workers, found working with cases of elder abuse challenging, frustrating, difficult, complex and at times dangerous. Issues included intimidating context of practice, practice dilemmas where the correct course of action was not clear, and supervisors were not always understanding or supportive. Social workers have an important role to play in aged care in general. The services they provide include information provision and education, counselling, mediation, advocacy, negotiating and arranging support services (Duffy & Healy, 2011).

Social work service in all contexts is underpinned by social work ethics which require social workers to promote justice and social fairness particularly for those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable, oppressed, or have special needs (Australia Association of Social Workers (AASW), 2010). In the global context of an ageing population, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) supports development of policies, programs, services and advocacy that supports and maintains the human rights and dignity of the elderly (Naughtin & Schofield, 2013). Social workers are therefore obliged to assist their clients address their problems and in the longer term advocate for appropriate policies and services that address the problems they have identified through direct service provision or research.

Social work with families where abuse is happening can be confronting and stressful. However, social workers have a mandate to assist people in distress which is stressful on the one hand but satisfying on the other, when one makes a difference to the lives of others (Band-Winterstein, Goldblatt, & Alon, 2014). In the case of Samuel, the social worker was able to empower him to negotiate the repayment arrangements and also understand how to protect himself against such exploitation in future.

Social work training would be helpful in working with these two families. Social work professionals are trained to: be sensitive and work without blaming victims; move at the pace of the clients; start where the clients are; understand the person in crisis and, engage in the client's history (Naughtin & Schofield, 2013). In addition the social workers need to

operate from a strength-based approach rather than a deficit-based perspective. A strength-based approach takes into consideration the assets the clients have and uses them as building blocks to build where they want to be (Pulla, 2012). Culture is such an asset but one does also need to be aware of potential negatives where some cultural practices may be incompatible with present reality (Mungai, 2012). Both parents and their sons and daughters have strengths that could be utilized in assisting the families in these two cases.

Social workers are guided by the principles of human rights and social justice. Material deprivation is indicated in both families in the case studies. Advocacy is one role social workers could play in the realization of human rights (Ife, 2012). Social workers could have advocated for Samuel to have the debt written off if payment put him in financial distress. Similarly, the George family had only one family member working and they could have been supported to find work and improve their material position if they wished to do so. Social workers who are properly trained can also have an important role to play in family mediation that recognises gender and cultural complexities (Barsky, 2001). Both families in these cases could have benefited from such interventions.

Limitations

A study based on teaching cases has advantages but also significant limitations when compared to studies based on empirical studies. Teaching cases play an important role in demonstrating the issues under study but ultimately they need to be followed by field studies if the issues discussed are to be substantiated. These teaching cases presented did not follow any rigorous definition of elder abuse. There is a lack of consistency in literature regarding what amounts to elder abuse and while some studies will accept one incident, like in the teaching cases presented here, other studies require that there are multiple incidents (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). The other limitation is that these cases have provided thin descriptions and more detailed biographical details would have been needed to fully understand the experiences of these two families. Despite these clear limitations, the cases have highlighted important issues of elder abuse that need the attention of social workers. Further studies would be needed to find out the extent of the problem and the best practice approach in ameliorating it. There are also challenges of research ethics of using made up cases or cases where details are altered (Ŝtrach & Everett, 2008). This is countered by the benefits of being able to present a situation that could otherwise be missed due to lack of empirical data. Research based on teaching cases need to supplement or trigger field data collection.

Conclusions

These two cases demonstrate that cases of elder abuse

exist in the African community living in Rural New South Wales. Research is needed to establish the extent and severity and the best way to address elder abuse without alienating the community. Failure to address these issues would risk the human rights of the elderly being abused.

Culture is a critical factor in understanding the issues of elder abuse in the African community. In general terms, culture includes all aspects of human activity including language, values, traditions, attitudes and rituals (Arnott, 2005). The traditional African cultures, like most other traditional cultures, regard the elders as guardians of traditional knowledge. The faster mastery of modern technologies by the young seems to lead to devaluation of the knowledge held by the elders and consequently to marginalize them. Re-engaging these elderly people and assisting them to pass on that traditional knowledge to the younger generation could be one way of reviving intergenerational communication and reducing marginalization of the elderly.

In teaching social work it is important to recognize the importance of the growing significance of the issue of elder abuse. Aged care is not currently given the importance it deserves in social work curriculum (Duffy & Healy, 2011). If social work education neglects the area then it contributes to the marginalization of the elderly and their issues.

When the suggested further research is conducted on the issue, then community education should follow to inform the community of the significance of the issue. It is also recognized that there is need for action at the national and global level that includes: political action in support of the ageing; democracy; rule of law; gender equality; protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; the right to development and; elimination of all forms of discrimination including age discrimination (United Nations, 2002). It is therefore clear that overall development and democracy is needed as well as involvement of all sectors to address the issues facing the elderly.

REFERENCES

Arnott, G. (2005). *Working in aged care and disability services.* Croydon, Victoria: Tertiary Press.

Australia Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2010). Code of Ethics. fromhttp://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2013). Ageing. from http://www.aihw.gov.au/ageing/

Awoniyi, S. (2015). African cultural values: the past, present and future. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 17(1), 1-13.

Band-Winterstein, T., Goldblatt, H., & Alon, S. (2014). Giving Voice to 'Age at the Edge' – A Challenge for Social Workers Intervening with Elder Abuse and Neglect. *Journal of Family Violence, 29*(7), 797-807. doi: 10.1007/s10896-014-9627-0

Barsky, A. (2001). Understanding family mediation from a social work perspective. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 18(1), 25-46.

Bonoma, T.V. (1985). Case research in marketing: opportunities, problems, and a process. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22, 199-208.

Burnes, D. P. R., Rizzo, V. M., & Courtney, E. (2014). Elder Abuse and Neglect Risk Alleviation in Protective Services. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 29*(11), 2091-2113. doi: 10.1177/0886260513516387

Cairns, J., & Vreugdenhil, A. (2014). Working at the frontline in cases of elder abuse: 'It keeps me awake at night'. *Australasian Journal on Ageing, 33*(1), 59-62. doi: 10.1111/ajag.12017

Childs, H., Hayslip, B., Radika, L., & Reinberg, J. (2000). Young and middle-aged adults' perceptions of elder abuse. *The Gerontologist, 40*(1), 75-85.

Duffy, F., & Healy, J. P. (2011). Social work with older people in a hospital setting. *Social Work in Health Care, 50*(1), 109-123.

Dwyer, C. (2000). Negotiating diasporic identities: Young British south Asian Muslim women. *Women's Studies International Forum, 23*(4), 475-486. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(00)00110-2

Gray, I. W., Dunn, P. F., Kelly, B. M., & Williams, C. J. (1991). *Immigrant settlement in country areas*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Ife, J. (2012). *Human rights and social work: towards rights-based practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johannesen, M., & LoGiudice, D. (2013). Elder abuse: a systematic review of risk factors in community-dwelling elders. *Age and Ageing, 42*(3), 292-298. doi: 10.1093/ageing/afs195

Jones, K. A. (2003). Making the Case for the Case Method in Graduate School Social Work Education. *Journal of Teaching Social Work, 23*(1-2), 183–200.

Kim, S., Phillips, W.R., Pinsky, L., Brock, D., Phillips, K., & Keary, J. (2006). A conceptual framework for developing teaching cases: a review and synthesis of the literature across disciplines. Medical Education, 40, 867-876. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02544.x

King, J. A., & Stevahn, L. (2013). *Interactive evaluation practice: mastering the interpersonal dynamics of program evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Lee, Y. S., & Gupta, R. (2011). Ageism and social exclusion in the United States: Implications for social work policy and and social work practice. In L. McDonald & K. L. Sharma (Eds.), *Ageism and elder abuse* (pp. 48-67). Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

Lippa, R. A. (2007). The preferred traits of mates in a cross-national study of heterosexual and homosexual men and women: an examination of biological and cultural influences. *Archives of sexual behaviour*, 36 (2), 193-2008.

Martin, J. (April 2012). 63,906 call Wagga home. *Daily Advertiser*. Retrieved from http://www.dailyadvertiser.com.au/news/local/news/general/63906-call-wagga-home/2509348.aspx

Mbiti, J. (1970). *African religions and philosophy*. New York: Anchor.

Morgan, K.P. (1991). Women and the knife: cosmetic surgery and the colonization of women's bodies. *Hypatia*, 6 (3), 25-30.

Moon, A. (2000). Perceptions of elder abuse among various cultural groups: similarities and differences. *Generations, 24*(2), 75-75.

Mungai, N. w. (2012). 'kwimenya': The cultural foundation for self-discovery. In V. Pulla, L. Chenoweth, A. Francis & S. Bakaj (Eds.), *Papers in strengths based practice* (pp. 112-124). New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Mungai, N. w. (2014). Resettling refugees in rural areas: Africans, Burmese, Bhutanese and Afghans in the Riverina NSW, Australia. In A. T. Ragusa (Ed.), *Rural lifestyles, community well-being and social change: Lessons from country Australia for global citizens* (pp. 145-205). Sharjah, U.A.E: Bentham e Books.

National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA). (2008). Physical abuse. from http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/physical.html

Naughtin, G., & Schofield, V. (2013). Working with older people. In M. Connolly & L. Harms (Eds.), *Social work: contexts and practice* (3rd ed., pp. 206-218). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Nsubuga-Kyobe, A. (2004). *Possible Antecedents and Implications to African-Australians participating in the proposed pilot program of settlement in rural Victoria.* Paper presented at the The African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Annual Conference 26-28 November 2004, University of Western Australia.

Payne, B. K. (2013). Elder Physical Abuse and Failure to Report Cases: Similarities and Differences in Case Type and the Justice System's Response. *Crime & Delinquency, 59*(5), 697-717. doi: 10.1177/0011128708317940

Phillips, J. E., Ajrouch, K. J., & Hillcoat-Nalletamby, S. (2010). *Key Concepts in Social Gerontology*. London, GBR: SAGE Publications Ltd. (UK).

Pitt, L.F., & Watson, L.T. (2011). The case for cases: writing and teaching cases for the emerging economies. Information Technology for Development, 17(4), 319-326. doi: 10.1080/02681102.2011.604080

Pulla, V. (2012). What are strengths based practices all about? In V. Pulla, L. Chenoweth, A. Francis & S. Bakaj (Eds.), *Papers in Strengths based practice* (pp. 1-18). New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

Schiele, J. H. (2000). *Human services and the Afrocentric paradigm*. New York: The Haworth Press.

Sherman, C. W., Rosenblatt, D. E., & Antonucci, T. C. (2011). Elder abuse and mistreatment: a life span and cultural context. In L. McDonald & K. L. Sharma (Eds.), *Ageism and elder abuse* (pp. 201-218). Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

State of Victoria Department of Health. (2012). *Elder abuse prevention and response guidelines for action 2012-14*. Melbourne: Department of health Retrieved from http://www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/downloads/pdf/eap_guidelines.pdf.

Štrach, P., & Everett, A. M. (2008). Transforming Research Case Studies into Teaching Cases. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 3*(3), 199-214.

United Nations. (2002). Report of the second world assembly on ageing, Madrid 8-12 April 2002*, p. 73. Retrieved from http://c-fam.org/docLib/20080625_Madrid_Ageing_Conference.pdf

Wendt, S., Bagshaw, D., Zannettino, L., & Adams, V. (2015). Financial abuse of older people: A case study. *International social work, 58*(2), 287-296. doi:10.1177/0020872813477882

World Health Organization/International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. (2002). Missing voices: Views of older persons on elder abuse. from http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/missing_voices/en/

World Health Organization. (2002). Active ageing: a policy framework. From http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf

World Health Organization. (2008). A global response to elder abuse and neglect: building primary health care capacity to deal with the problem worldwide: main report. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/43869/1/9789241563581_eng.pdf

World Health Organization. (2015). Ageing and life-course: elder abuse.http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/en/

Yin, R. K. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Los Angeles: Sage.