

Supporting the Adult Protective Services Workforce

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Issue: An estimated one in ten adults over the age of 60 suffers some form of elder abuse. A key component of addressing ongoing elder abuse and the likelihood that its prevalence will increase as a result of a rapidly growing older adult population is the network of local and state agencies that form the country's system of community adult protective services (APS). Support for this workforce should be a public health priority.

Methods: The information presented in this brief is derived from a combination of sources, including academic literature, publications produced by stakeholder organizations, and selected key informant interviews with representatives of those organizations.

Findings: APS investigations entail a complex scope of work that requires assessment of social, behavioral, and medical issues, as well as legal issues having to do with self-determination and possible criminality. The educational preparation, as well as post-employment training opportunities for frontline APS social workers are highly variable. Inter-agency coordination and interdisciplinary teams play a critical role in APS, but frontline workers' access to expert consultation may be limited, depending on local conditions. Dedicated funding to support APS is lacking, and this contributes to high rates of staff turnover and inefficient services delivery. Despite limited resource, local APS networks are consistently engaged in innovative efforts to reimagine and redesign service delivery to improve effectiveness.

Discussion: APS should be promoted as a meta-discipline, practiced not just by social services and law enforcement professionals, but healthcare providers, caregivers, and all who routinely have professional contact with older adults. Grant funding is needed to develop telemedicine-like systems that APS social workers could utilize to access expert consultation not available in their local networks. Federal monies could be used to incentivize bachelor's and master's social work program graduates to pursue careers in APS, similar to how Title IV-E funds are used to support child welfare social work. APS has limited visibility within the health services research and workforce training agenda. There is a need for high quality research examining issues including the effectiveness of different intervention models, best practices in the use of interdisciplinary teams, and improving data collection and dissemination methods.

Key Words: Adult protective services; elder abuse; aging population; population health; workforce development; education and training

HWRC Website Link:

https://healthworkforce.ucsf.edu/sites/healthworkforce.ucsf.edu/files/hwrc_aps_report_2.12.2020_FINAL.pdf