

A Criminal In Our Midst

A crime is about to occur at the bank. Only there will be no screams. No guns. No masked men. The victim—possibly your elderly mother, father or grandmother—will walk into the bank, acting on behalf of or even accompanied by your brother or sister—the perpetrator. After being intimidated, coerced or tricked, your parent or grandparent will hand over \$5,000 to your sibling.

Financial exploitation of the elderly occurs when there is an illegal use of a vulnerable adult's resources for another person's profit or gain. The vulnerable adult is at least 60 years old, or disabled and between 18 and 59. And it's the person's vulnerability—due to frailty, illness, confusion or depression—as well as their close proximity to the perpetrator, that make them an easy target.

Adult children victimize their parents in 60.4% of substantiated financial exploitation cases investigated by state adult protective services agencies. That's according to a 1998 National Center on Elder Abuse report. The primary reasons include the easy access adult children have to their mother or father or other elderly relatives, as well as the love parents have for their children—a love which can function to lower the potential victims' suspicions and defenses. Grandchildren and other relatives also victimize their elderly loved ones in 19% of financial exploitation cases, followed by friends and



neighbors at 8.7%. Those who commit the crime tend to be young or middle-aged: almost one-half are less than 40, while almost 40% are between 41 and 59.

Nationwide, financial exploitation is the third most frequent type of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation of seniors and the disabled. Advanced age increases a person's chance of becoming victimized. For instance, almost one-half of all victims are 80 or older, but only 3 percent of victims are between 60 and 64 years old. This late-life trend is the result of mental and physical impairments that limit one's ability to understand and make reasoned decisions.

Last year, Missouri's Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) received 1,184 reports of financial exploitation of the elderly. Though this number is on the rise, the crime is vastly underreported because of the emotional bond between

victim and perpetrator. Often seniors and disabled persons are socially isolated and physically and emotionally dependent on a son, daughter, or caregiver, making it nearly impossible for them to report. If they do report, they often recant their stories for fear of becoming institutionalized.

DHSS receives and investigates reports of financial exploitation of elderly and disabled Missourians. If you suspect one of your elderly or disabled customers is being financially exploited, call the Department of Health and Senior Services' toll-free hotline at 1-800-392-0210. We can help.

