Proclivity to Elder Abuse
A Community Study on Hong Kong Chinese

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This study aimed to provide preliminary estimates on proclivity to elder abuse and to determine the efficacy of the intergenerational transmission of violence and ecological theories in predicting elder abuse in contemporary Chinese societies. A total of 464 (225 males and 239 females) Chinese residing in Hong Kong completed questionnaires on attitudes toward elderly people, modernity, and filial piety as well as childhood experiences of abuse and proclivity to elder abuse. Results indicated that proclivity to verbal elder abuse was the most common among the three depicted types of abuse, accounting for 20% of the sample, whereas proclivity to physical and social elder abuse was less common, each accounting for 2.4%. A high level of childhood experience of abuse consistently emerged as the single most salient predictor for participants' endorsement of proclivity to elder abuse, while negative attitudes toward elderly people and modernity were the second and third most salient predictors.

Keywords: Chinese elder abuse proclivity; Chinese attitudes toward elderly; intergenerational transmission of violence

Over the past decades, elder abuse has become a major concern throughout the world. Since the reporting of the first case of “granny bashing” (Burston, 1975), studies have documented the widespread nature of elder abuse across countries (Bennett & Kingston, 1993; Comijs, Pot, Smit, Bouter, & Jonker, 1998; Kosberg & Garcia, 1995; Ogg & Mumm-Giddings, 1993; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988; Pitsiou-Darrough & Spinellis, 1995; Pittaway & Westhues, 1993; Podnieks, 1990; Yan & Tang, 2001). One of the problems faced by early research on elder abuse was debate about behaviors that constitute elder abuse. Nowadays, a typical breakdown of elder abuse into categories includes physical, psychological, and material/social abuse as well as neglect (Glendenning, 1997; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988; Wolf & Pillemer, 1989). Following the standard definition derived by Pillemer and Finkelhor (1988), the present study focused on verbal, physical, and social elder abuse.