This study examined the prevalence of elder abuse of Chinese in Hong Kong and also assessed its impact on their psychological functioning. A total of 355 (120 males, 235 females) elderly Chinese residing in Hong Kong responded to a questionnaire administered individually. Results indicated prevalence rates of 2% for physical abuse and 20.8% for verbal abuse. These rates were higher than those reported by a telephone survey of similar respondents. Rates did not differ significantly for men and women. Data from the General Health Questionnaire showed that abused elders, as compared with nonabused elders, scored significantly higher on overall psychological distress. Abused participants were also significantly more dependent on their caregivers than nonabused participants. This difference did not, however, predict the level of psychological distress after accounting for physical abuse and verbal abuse.

Prevalence and Psychological Impact of Chinese Elder Abuse

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Domestic violence has attracted considerable attention and research across countries. Early research focused on wife and child abuse, and elder abuse has emerged as another facet of domestic violence only in the past two decades. In the United States, one study found that about 3.2% of elderly people had been abused in at least one of the ways defined by the researchers (Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988). In a study in Britain, the prevalence rates were 5% for verbal abuse, 2% for physical abuse, and 2% for financial abuse (Ogg & Mumm-Giddings, 1993). Similar rates were also found in a study conducted in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, with 5.6% for overall prevalence rate, 3.2% for verbal aggression, and 1.2% for physical aggression (Comijs, Pot, Smit, Bouter, & Jonker, 1998).

The conceptualization of elder abuse presents problems as there is little consensus regarding the minimum standards of care necessary to maintain the dignity and quality of life in old people or whose responsibility it is to ensure these standards are met. Indeed, one of the problems faced by early research on elder abuse was disagreements on definitions (Galbraith, 1989). Although most studies have included physical abuse, psychological abuse, and violation of rights under the definitions of elder abuse (Block & Sinnott, 1979; Lau & Kosberg, 1979), others argue that it is necessary to make distinctions between abuse and neglect (Crouse, Cobbs, Harris, Kopecky, &