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Elder abuse is "a wicked problem," says speaker

Roger Mannon Sep 23, 2017



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Elder abuse, an ongoing problem, was the topic at a TRIAD program presented at a community luncheon at Plenty! Farm recently.

Pam Teaster, Director of Gerontology Research at Virginia Tech, told the group that economic exploitation of senior citizens “is a wicked problem. It affects elderly in social, medical and financial ways.”

The problem is amplified because it can come from so many avenues, Teaster stated. “A lot of times it is from family members, but it can also come from neighbors, anyone that is in a position of trust.

“The elderly may have acquired money over a lifetime, or they have other valuables. They may also be alone and isolated, and maybe they have a cognitive decline.”

Victims tend to be mostly in their eighties, while the ones taking advantage of them are in their forties and fifties, Teaster said. “There are also strangers, who often attempt scams over the telephone.”

Women tend to be victimized by a two-to-one ratio, sometimes because they did not have previous experience in controlling the family budget. Widow and widowers sometimes fall victim to “sweetheart scams,” when a younger person of the opposite sex feigns interest to gain their trust.

“Our research at Virginia Tech shows that it is a problem on the magnitude of about \$3 billion dollars a year,” Teaster said. “A lot of times a child or family member with a drug problem will exploit their relative.”

Eric Branscom, Floyd County’s Commonwealth Attorney, said the problem is frequent in Floyd. “If it is stolen cash, sometimes it hard to put together an evidence trail to prosecute a case. With stolen checks, or credit card theft and fraud, there is a way to track it.”

Ryan Hupp, Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney, said he had prosecuted a case involving a man on Route 8, who was scammed by men who brought a load of gravel and told him he could have it at a discount. They dumped the load and later charged him \$700.

Teaster suggested that elders be cautioned “not to give a quick answer. Beware of something that sounds too good to be true, because it probably is.”