

Best practices for interviewing older adults with diverse backgrounds and needs: Current research and future directions

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Research Interests:

- Prevention, identification and investigative practices in cases of older adult maltreatment.
- Investigative interviewing with populations with special needs.

Registered School and Clinical Psychologist in Ontario.

- Child and adolescent populations.
- Therapy, intervention, assessment, crisis intervention and consultation services.
- School, hospital and private clinic settings.





Training Needs of Health Professionals & Law Enforcement

Study #1: Training Needs of Health Professionals

37 Health professionals in Ontario, Canada who work with older adults.

- (*Age* = 36.8 years; 73% female)
- Years of Experience: 0.5 to 32 (*M* = 8.52 years).

Qualitative interview and questionnaires.

- Answered questions regarding their experiences identifying, assessing and reporting older adult maltreatment.



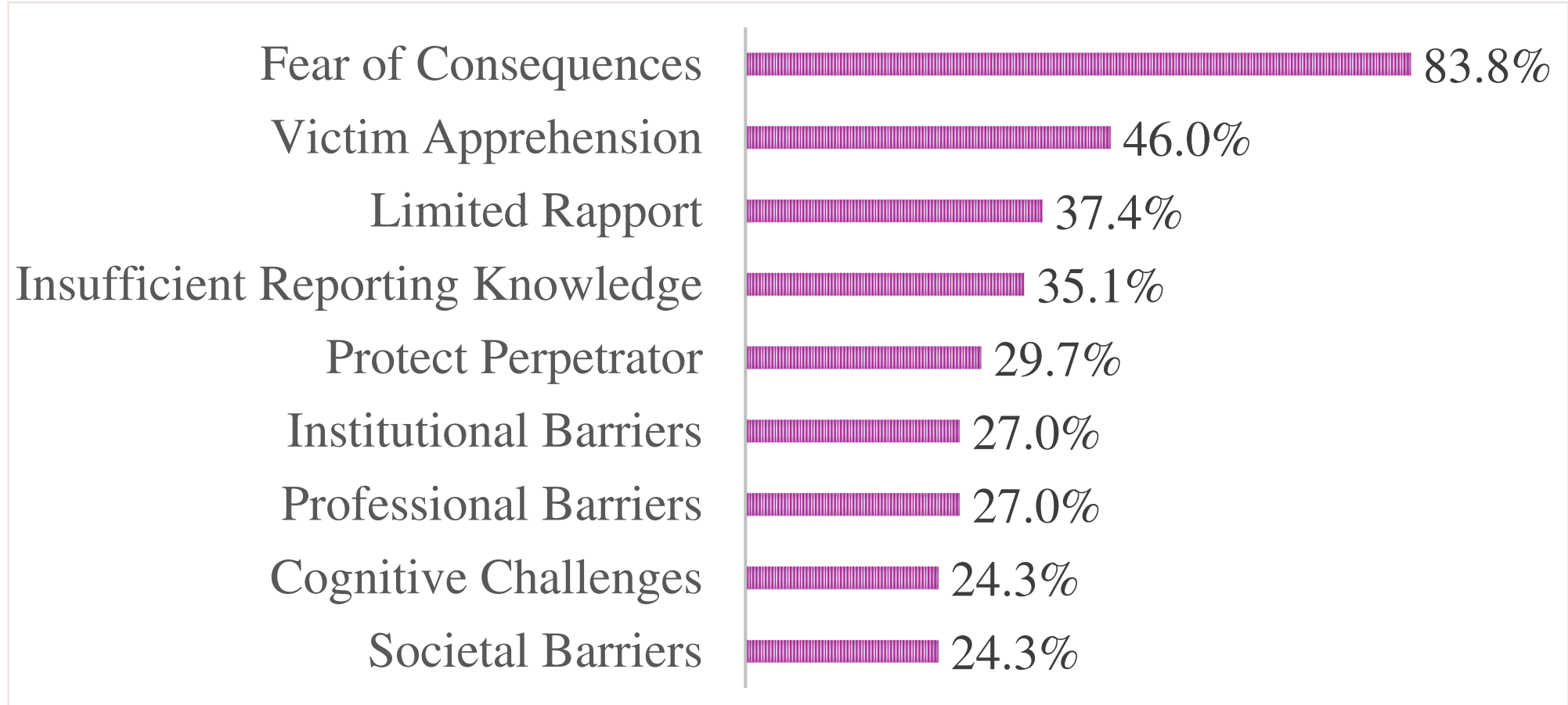
Frequency of Maltreatment

- 24 out of 37 (64.9%) reported observing older adult maltreatment “frequently” and on at least a monthly basis.
- 14 out of 37 (37.9%) reported observing maltreatment on a weekly basis.

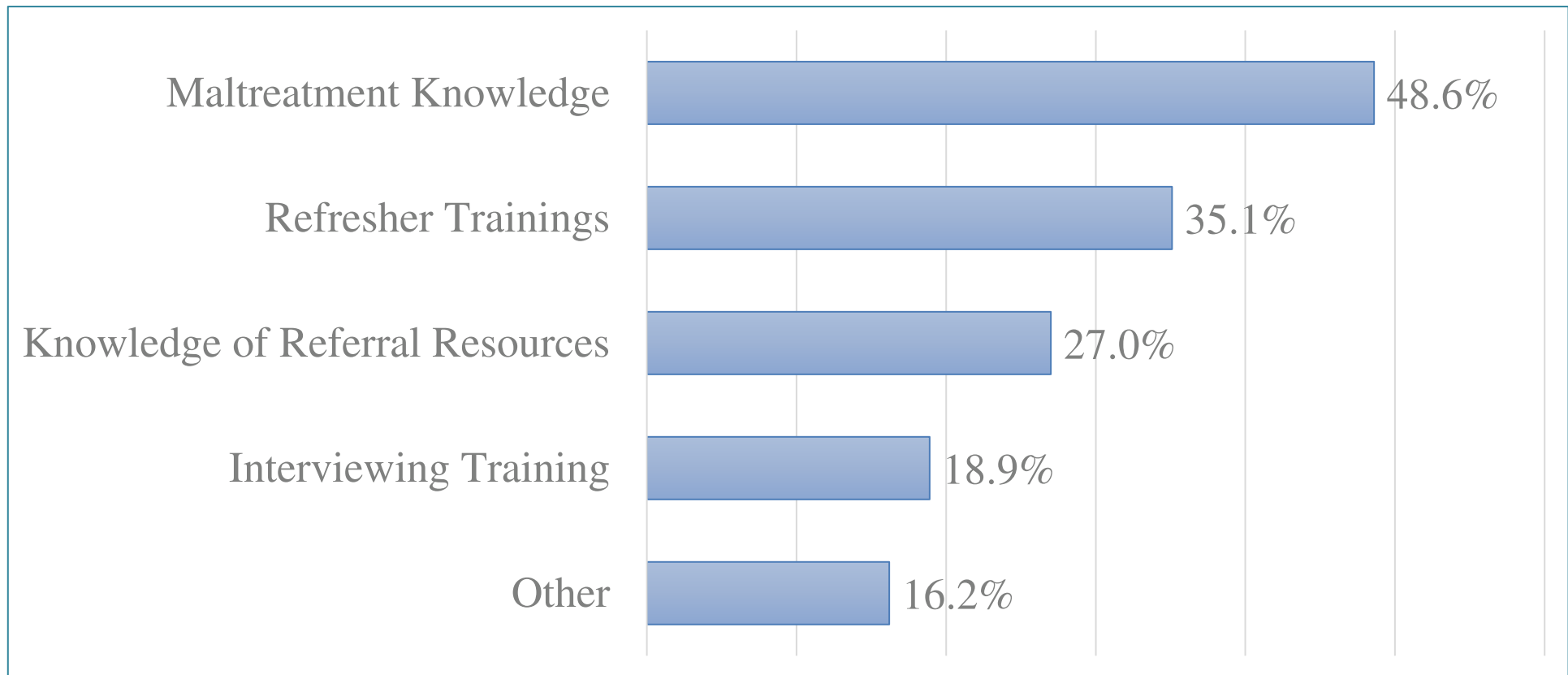
“Sometimes three or four times a week when I’m on my shift. Abuse of elderly—people who don’t give them their medicine.”

“Oh, probably at least, like I guess at least maybe like, every couple weeks or something like that. There constantly seems to be those kinds of issues coming up.”

Barriers to Reporting Maltreatment



Training Needs



Study #2: Canadian law enforcement perceptions of older adult maltreatment, interviewing practices and training needs: A qualitative study

(Wyman, ElSaleh, Dion Larivière, & Malloy, 2025)

Law professionals in Canada who work with older adults were interviewed.

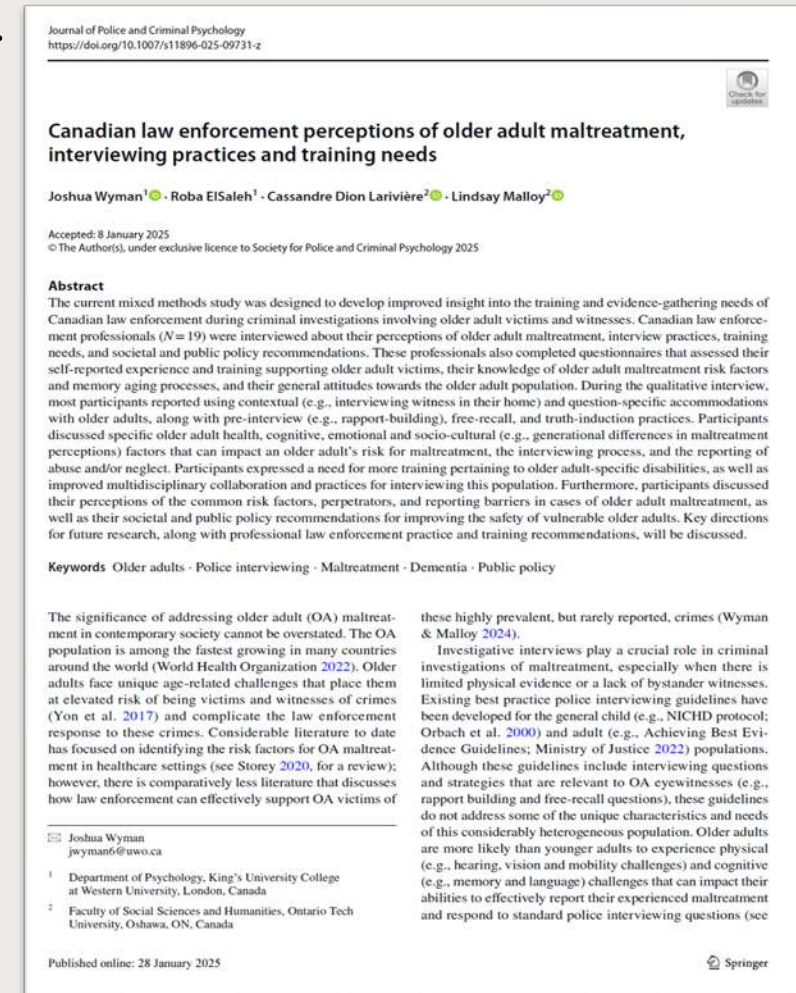
- I. Observations of older adult abuse and neglect.
- II. Current interviewing practices.
- III. Training experiences and recommendations.

$N = 19$ ($M_{age} = 49$ years old; $n_{females} = 10$)

- 17 worked in Ontario
- 2 worked in British Columbia

Years of Experience: 10 to 31 years ($M = 20$ years).

Level of Experience (M): 7.8 out of 10 (Range = 5 to 10).



Interviewing Challenges

Interviewing Challenge	%	Response Examples
Health Factors	88%	Memory, language, hearing, vision and mobility challenges that impact interviewing process.
Emotional Factors	65%	Feelings of despair, sadness, regret, shame, embarrassment, fear or denial. Distrust towards the interviewer.
Social-Cultural Factors	47%	Generational differences in how different forms of maltreatment are perceived and reported. Family dynamic problems.
Awareness of Maltreatment	24%	Limited understanding of what older adult maltreatment entails. Lack of awareness of their experienced maltreatment.

Training Needs & Recommendations

Training Recommendation	%	Response Examples
Disability Training	52.6%	Supporting OAs with a dementia-related diseases, and those with vision, hearing and mobility problems.
Multidisciplinary Training	52.6%	How to effectively collaborate with medical, bank, and anti-fraud specialists; more knowledge of OA community referral resources.
Interviewing Training & Guidelines	42.1%	Question and interview adaptations for OAs; memory enhancing question strategies; sworn statement adaptations.
More Comprehensive Training	31.6%	More refresher and frequent training opportunities; more comprehensive OA training.
Older Adult Rights Training	21.1%	Increased knowledge of Power of Attorney role and responsibilities; credibility assessments for OAs; confidentiality rights; OA legal wills.

Study #3 (Ongoing): Police Interview Practices with Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments and Training Needs

Objectives: Survey that explores law enforcement experiences, practices and training interviewing older adults who are:

- Experiencing a form of cognitive degeneration (e.g., Alzheimer's disease).
- Members of Indigenous communities.

Eligibility: Law enforcement professional in Canada.

- Experience interviewing older adults, formally or informally.
- Data collection is ongoing.

Contact Information:

- Dr. Joshua Wyman: jwyman6@uwo.ca

Participate In:



Police Interviewing Research

Dr. Joshua Wyman, Assistant Professor at King's University College at Western University, is conducting an online survey that is designed to enhance police practices and training for interviewing older adult victims and witnesses.

ELIGIBILITY:

Employed as a law enforcement professional in Canada.

1. This study will take between 45-60 minutes to complete.
2. Participants will be compensated with a \$30 Amazon e-gift card.
3. All information provided will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Survey Link: https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dgpuD64sd9DLdpc

You can also contact Dr. Joshua Wyman at jwyman6@uwo.ca for information.



Participant Characteristics

27 law enforcement professionals in Ontario have completed this study to date.

- Detectives, frontline police officers, constables, fraud investigators.
- *Age* = 43.9 years
- 8.1 out of 10 average self-reported level of experience.

This study is ongoing.

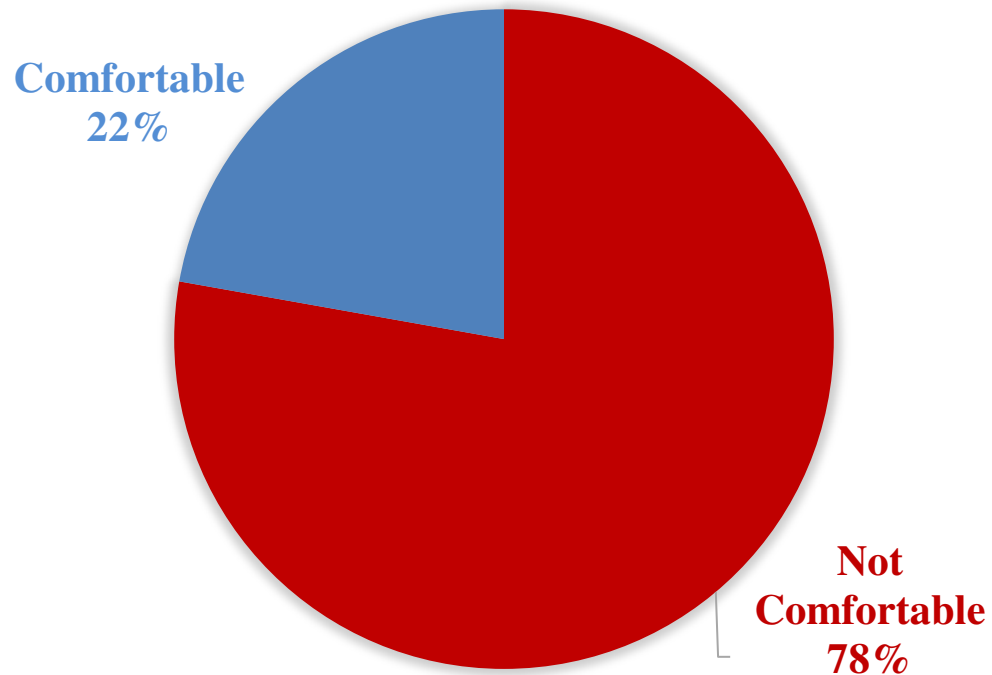
- We hope to recruit 80 to 100 law enforcement professionals.

Survey Topic	Subtopics
Police Interviewing Experiences and Confidence	1. Police Interviewing Experiences with Older Adults 2. Self-Reported Confidence Interviewing Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments
Police Interviewing Practices	1. Police Interview Question Strategies
Police Training Experiences	1. Older Adult Training Received and Confidence in Training Preparedness
Alzheimer's Disease Knowledge	1. Performance on ADKS. 2. Self-Reported Experience and Confidence
Interviewing Older Adults in Indigenous Communities	1. Approach to Policing in Indigenous Communities 2. Importance of Ensuring Culturally Appropriate Police Practices 3. Future Changes for Indigenous Communities

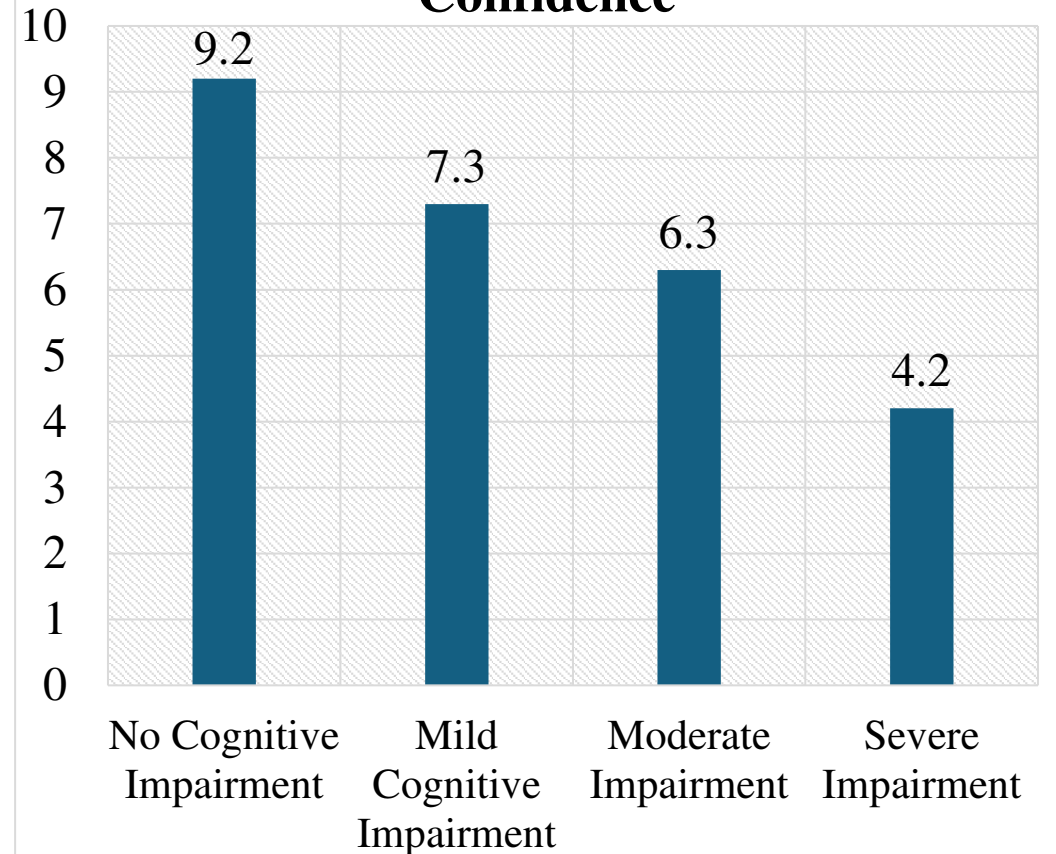
Preliminary Findings ($N = 27$)

Law Enforcement Training Preparedness & Confidence

Preparedness to Interview Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments



Older Adult Interviewing Confidence



Training Background & Confidence

Topic	% of Participants Who Received Training	Mean Confidence in Training Preparedness
Interview practices with all populations	92.6%	8.6 out of 10
Interviewing older adults specifically	33.3%	6.6 out of 10
Dementia-related diseases	25.9%	4.5 out of 10
Older adults with memory challenges	18.5%	3.9 out of 10
Older adults with language challenges	11.1%	4.3 out of 10
Older adults with hearing challenges	18.5%	4.5 out of 10
Older adults with vision challenges	11.1%	4.5 out of 10
Older adults with mobility challenges	22.2%	5.6 out of 10
Older adults with mental health challenges	25.9%	5.2 out of 10
Multicultural training	51.9%	6.3 out of 10
Older adults from Aboriginal, First Nations or Indigenous groups	29.6%	4.8 out of 10
Older adult legal rights	22.2%	5.4 out of 10
Power of Attorney laws and rights	40.7%	5.8 out of 10
Risk factors for older adult physical abuse	48.1%	6.1 out of 10
Risk factors for older adult sexual abuse	40.7%	5.3 out of 10
Risk factors for older adult psychological abuse	44.4%	5.3 out of 10
Risk factors for older adult neglect	37.0%	5.6 out of 10
Risk factors for older adult financial exploitation	55.6%	6.7 out of 10
Referral services and supports for older adults	44.4%	5.5 out of 10



Older Adult Victims & Witnesses: Important Considerations

Age-Related Differences in Eyewitness Performance

Older adults can provide accurate, reliable and detailed rich eyewitness reports.

- Performance similar to younger adults on memory recognition tasks.

However, older adults perform worse than younger adults on measures of:

1. Free-recall memory quantity.
2. Free-recall memory accuracy.
3. Lineup identification accuracy.
4. Suspect distance threshold.
5. Misinformation effect.
6. Expert perceptions of memory performance.



The screenshot shows a digital page from a book. On the left is a sidebar with the book's title, editors' names (Allison D. Redlich and Jodi A. Quas), a search bar, and a table of contents. The main area on the right displays the chapter title '29 Older Adults as Victims and Witnesses' by Eve Brank, a DOI link, page numbers (611-624), and a publication date (18 December 2023). Below this is an 'Abstract' section with a paragraph of text, followed by 'Keywords' and 'Subject' tags. At the bottom, it lists the 'Series' as 'Oxford Library of Psychology' and the 'Collection' as 'Oxford Handbooks Online'.

CHAPTER
29 Older Adults as Victims and Witnesses
Eve Brank
<https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549513.013.29>
Pages 611–624
Published: 18 December 2023

Abstract
The older adult population is one of the fastest growing in the United States due to advances in medicine and aging baby boomers. Developmentally, bodies and minds go through changes as they age that contribute to victimization risk and eyewitness accuracy. Although official crime statistics suggest that older adults are infrequently crime victims, they may fear being victimized at a greater rate than other age groups and they are at increased risk of being victimized by family members who are entrusted to care for them. Older adults who are victimized or who witness another crime can be called upon to serve as an eyewitness. Eyewitness research that has focused on older adults as eyewitnesses has found that they generally do not perform as well as younger adults due to both developmental and generational differences. Using older adults in research requires creativity and extra efforts, but it is a worthwhile pursuit, given their potential for victimization and other involvement in the legal system.

Keywords: older adults, elder, victim, victimization, eyewitness, witness
Subject: Developmental Psychology, Criminal and Forensic Psychology, Psychology
Series: Oxford Library of Psychology
Collection: Oxford Handbooks Online

Memory Recall: Older Adults with Dementia

Older adults with dementia perform relatively lower than healthy older adults on measures of:

1. Emotional and non-emotional word recognition (Nieuwenhuis-Mark et al., 2009).
2. Free-recall of autobiographical events (Wiglesworth & Mosqueda, 2011).

Table 2. Recall Means (Standard Deviation) for the 3 Groups in Each of the Critical Conditions ^a			
	Group		
	Controls	MCI	AD
Total recall	104 (17.3)	72.2 (15.4)	49.5 (22.9)
Nonemotional	25.0 (5.0)	16.8 (3.7)	11.1 (5.9)
Emotional	25.4 (6.1)	18.8 (4.7)	12.4 (5.4)
Separate word lists recall			
Standard	26.3 (4.3)	17.8 (3.7)	12.9 (7.2)
Neutral	25.0 (5.0)	16.8 (3.7)	11.1 (5.9)
Positive	26.5 (4.8)	18.5 (4.8)	13.1 (6.2)
Negative	26.3 (6.1)	19.2 (5.5)	12.4 (5.7)
HADS scores			
Anxiety	3.2 (2.5)	3.7 (3.7)	2.8 (2.7)
Depression	2.9 (2.3)	3.8 (3.1)	2.5 (1.8)

Abbreviations: MCI, mild cognitive impairment; AD, Alzheimer's disease
^a Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) scores for the 3 groups are also provided.

Table from: Nieuwenhuis-Mark, R. E., Schalk, K., & de Graaf, N. (2009). Free recall and learning of emotional word lists in very elderly people with and without dementia. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias*, 24(2), 155-162.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1533317508330561>



Capacity Can Be Static OR It Can Fluctuate

For many adults, cognitive and psychological functioning remains relatively consistent day-to-day. Some factors that can impact our day-to-day functioning include:

- Chronic fatigue, stress or pain.
- Exposure to trauma.
- Intoxication or substance use withdrawal.

Older Adults with Dementia-Related Diseases: Level of functioning progressively gets worse over time.

- Level of functioning can fluctuate over the course of the day.
- **Sundowning** is increased confusion that people living with dementia may experience from dusk through night-time.

Impact of Ageism

1. Impact on Interviewer:

- Interview may forgo asking important open-ended interview questions and rely more on closed-ended practices.
- Interviewer may “infantilize” older adult, which reduces level of trust, respect and rapport.

2. Impact on Interviewee:

- Causes an older adult to doubt or distrust their own memory capacity.
- Can increase risk for suggestibility and interviewer compliance.

3. Impacts juror perceptions of older adult eyewitnesses.

- Mock jurors with higher ageist attitudes had more negative perceptions of on older adult victim of neglect (Wasarhaley & Golding, 2017).
- Mock jurors were less likely to convict a perpetrator of older adult financial exploitation when the eyewitness report came from an older adult with a cognitive impairment (Golding et al., 2013).

See Brank (2023) for a review.



Interviewing Older Adults: Best Practices & Accommodations

Increasing disclosures of older adult maltreatment: A review of best practices for interviewing older adult eyewitnesses and victims

(Wyman & Malloy, 2024)

Provided a comprehensive overview of the existing older adult police interviewing literature.

Effective Strategies:

- Rapport building
- Cultural responsiveness
- Supportive and empathetic demeanor
- Free-recall invitations.
- Open-ended follow-up prompts.
- Wh-questions.
- Closed-ended questions that build upon what older adult previously discussed (e.g., clarification questions).



Older Adult Interviewing Adaptations

1. Interview older adult at their personal residence.
2. Wearing plainclothes during interviews with police officers.
3. Technological aids (Bluetooth receivers for hearing aid devices and voice amplifiers).
4. Redirections.
5. Timing of the interview, such as in the morning.
6. Follow-up or additional interview opportunities.
7. Follow-up communication and check-ins are encouraged.

(Government of Western Australia, 2023; Modell Consulting Group, 2023; Wyman & Malloy, 2024; Wyman et al., 2025)



Interviewing Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments

1. **Plan for more time to interview older adult.**
2. **Consult with caregivers, family members and multidisciplinary professionals.**
3. **Do not infantilize person.**
 - Have an understanding of your own biases and stereotypes towards older adults with cognitive challenges.
4. **If possible, have support person nearby or in the same building.**
 - Older adult may require support with administering medication, going to the washroom or if they become distressed or highly confused.
5. **Acquiring consent is an ongoing process.**
6. **Speak slowly and clearly.**
 - Always face interviewee when communicating.
 - Do not raise your voice to a high degree. Have a low-pitch and reassuring tone.
 - Avoid overly complex words, slangs and acronyms.
 - Incorporate descriptive nonverbal gestures when communicating verbally.
 - Explaining your actions may also be needed.

Interviewing Older Adults with Cognitive Impairments

7. Chunking information is helpful.

- Step-by-step instructions with pauses and clarification opportunities.
- Breaking up larger questions into smaller parts.

8. Keep questions short and focused.

- Focused open-ended questions and prompts are especially helpful.
- Follow-up closed-ended questions that build-upon what was previously disclosed.

9. Avoid cognitively taxing questions.

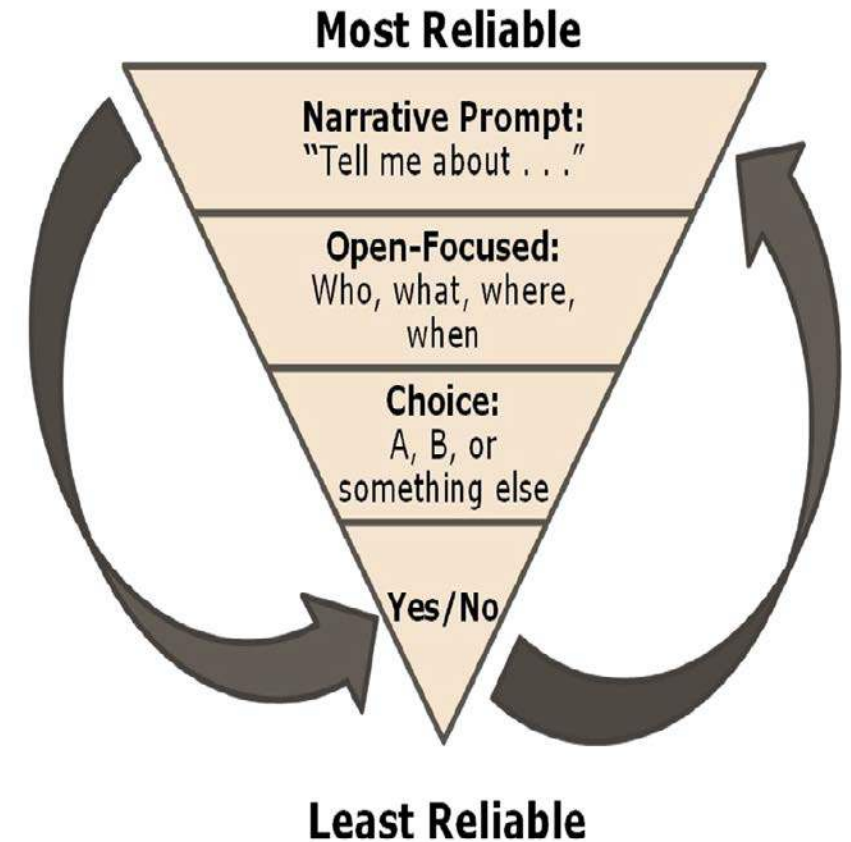
10. Be prepared to repeat yourself or reintroduce yourself.

11. Do not argue with person or try to orient them to reality.

- Older adult awareness of the situation, context of interview or sense of present reality may change over the course of the interview.
- Elevated stress increases likelihood of confusion.

Interview Practices to Avoid

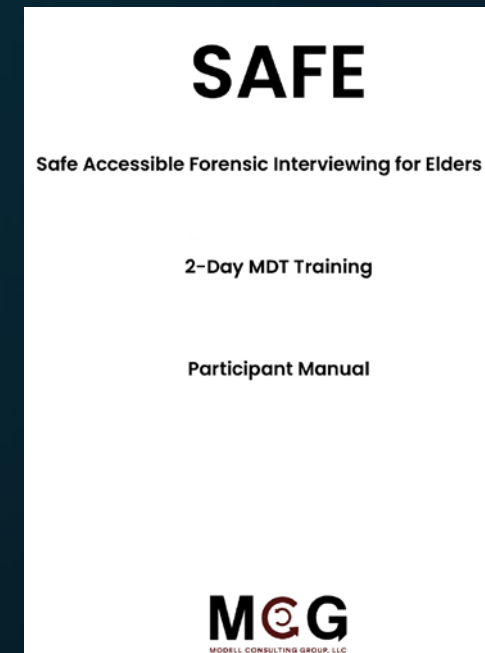
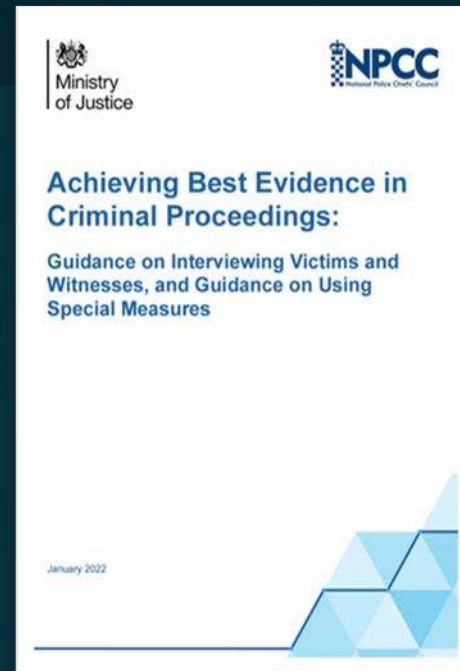
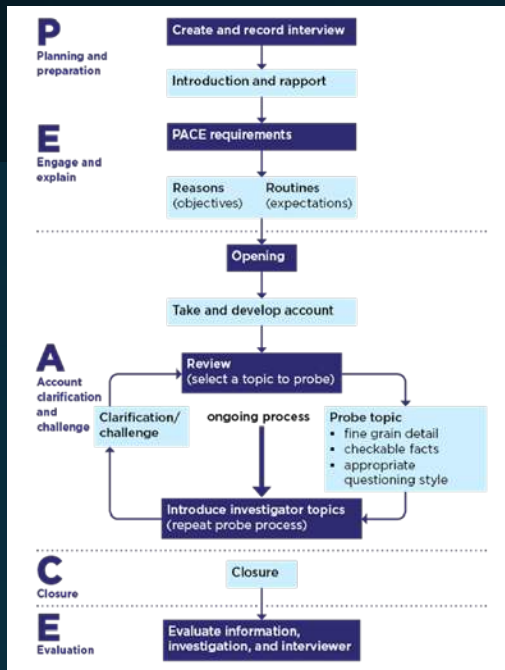
- Leading and/or suggestive questions.
- Multiple questions.
- Overly broad questions.
- Unsupportive demeanor.
- Confrontations.
- Blaming the victim.
- Overly long interviews.



(Government of Western Australia, 2023; Modell Consulting Group, 2024;
Wyman & Malloy, 2024)

The Recycling Funnel Model.
(Modell Consulting Group, 2024).

Best Practice Interviewing Guidelines



Key Takeaways

1. **Health and law enforcement professionals in Ontario have expressed an important need for improved training and resources for supporting older adults most at risk for maltreatment.**
2. **Like younger adults, older adults benefit from open-ended recall questions and follow-up prompts.**
 - Overly broad, complex and cognitively taxing questions are less effective with older adults over the age of 75 and those with lower cognitive scores.
 - Planning in advance for the interview is essential.
3. **Recently, best practice interviewing recommendations have been developed for older adults.**
 - Several accommodations exist for older adults with cognitive, physical and mental health challenges.
 - Research is needed to assess the efficacy of these training resources and interviewing guidelines.



Any Questions or Comments?

Thank you for your time!

If you are interested in learning more about our research, please feel free to contact me at jwyman6@uwo.ca

I can also contact you by email if you prefer 😊



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