Giving Voice: The Lived Experience of Financial Exploitation Among Older African Americans

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ABSTRACT: Financial exploitation (FE) prevalence studies suggest that older African Americans (OAA) are disproportionately affected by FE as compared to older adults of other ethnicities/races. FE impacts the mental and physical health of victims. Missing in the literature is how FE occurs and the ethno-sociocultural framework in which it occurs among OAA. This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore the existence of unique FE risk and protective factors within an ecological context and to describe the essence of the lived experience of FE from a cultural perspective. The revealed essence of the FE experience from the perspectives of OAA, under-represented among participants in an emerging field, is critical to understanding this problem. Rationale for this study are: a) to give voice to a group under-represented in research, b) to obtain a thick, rich description of the FE experience that will provide direction for future development of a culturally relevant assessment and preventive intervention, c) to inform social policy related to FE of older adults, d) to positively influence the health outcomes of OAA, and e) to add to the scientific body of knowledge in the area of FE. The purposeful sample was composed of 12 community dwelling OAA ages 60+, recruited from a senior seminar convened by this researcher and guided by community-based participatory research. This study elicited victims’ perceptions and provided answers to research questions. Data collection method included in-depth interviews and surveys. Data were analyzed according to the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for phenomenological inquiries as modified by Clark Moustakas. Findings were interpreted within the context of relevant literature and concepts in this study’s conceptual framework: a) dependency, b) health disparities, c) legacy of slavery, d) loyalty to family, e) strong sense of community, f) value of the elderly, g) poverty, h) racism, and i) spirituality and resilience. Six themes emerged: One man’s need is another’s greed; Taken for a ride, an unsafe ride; Keep our guard up; Wretched pain; No good deed goes unpunished; The love of money is the root of all evil. Themes were discussed with an intersectional lens of history of slavery, race, class, and gender.