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

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Assistant Professor at King's University College at Western University.

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.

➢ (*Mage* = 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.
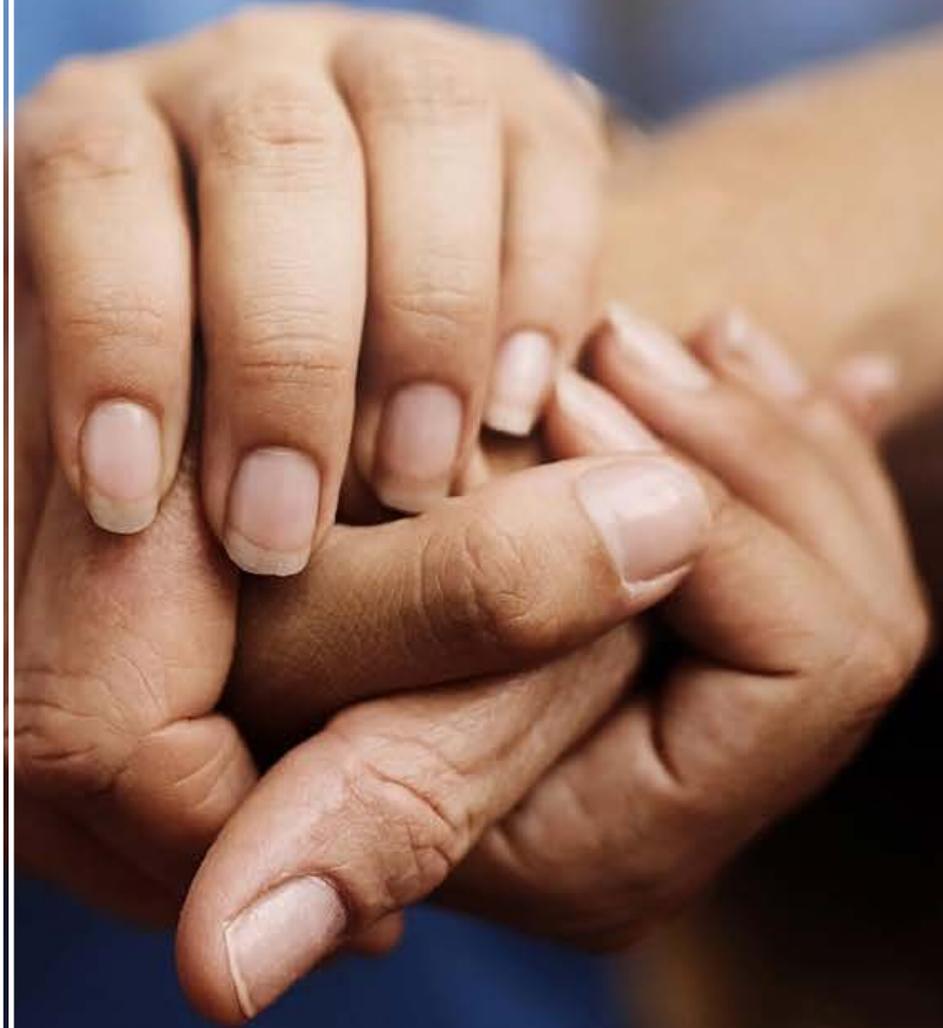
Frequency of Maltreatment

- 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

Barrier	Percentage
Fear of Consequences	83.8%
Victim Apprehension	46.0%
Limited Rapport	37.4%
Insufficient Reporting Knowledge	35.1%
Protect Perpetrator	29.7%
Institutional Barriers	27.0%
Professional Barriers	27.0%
Cognitive Challenges	24.3%
Societal Barriers	24.3%
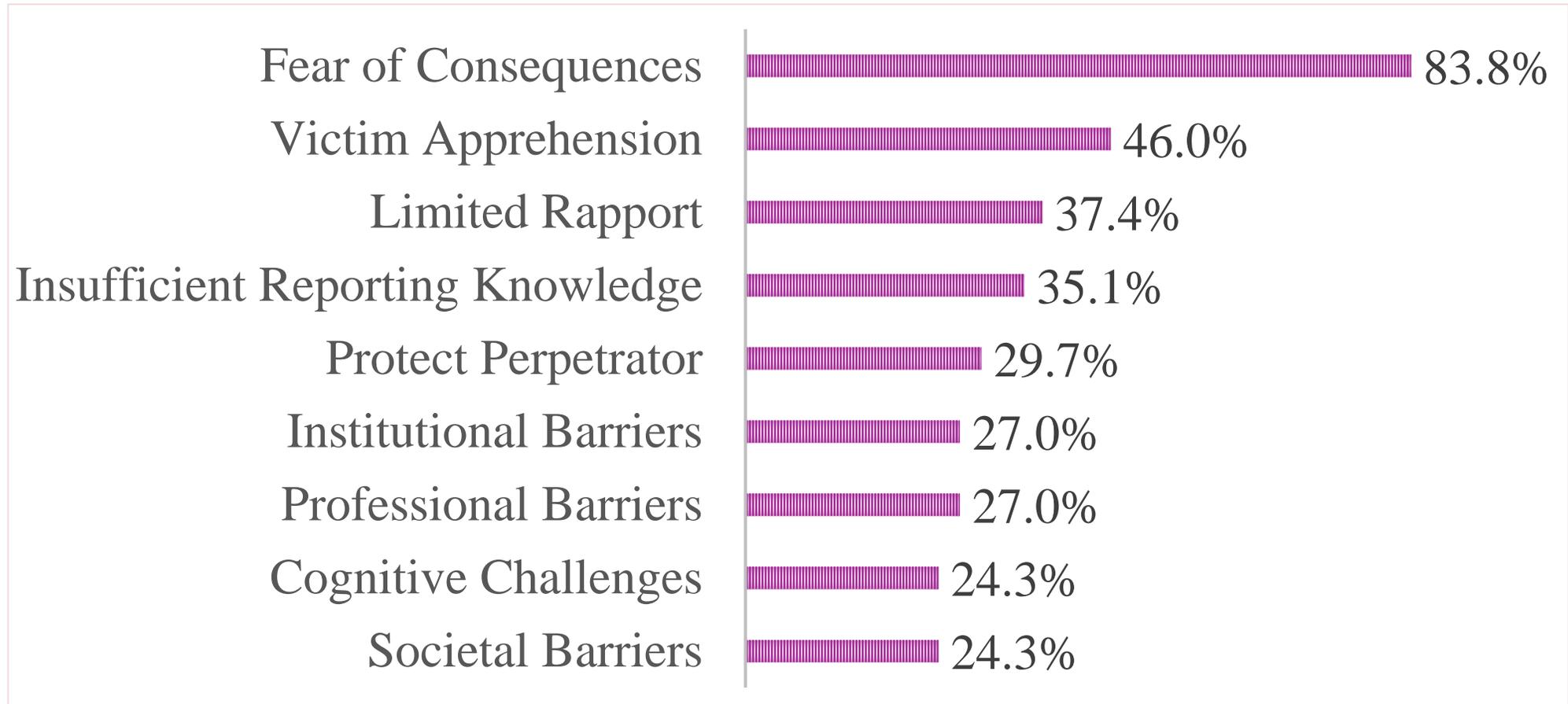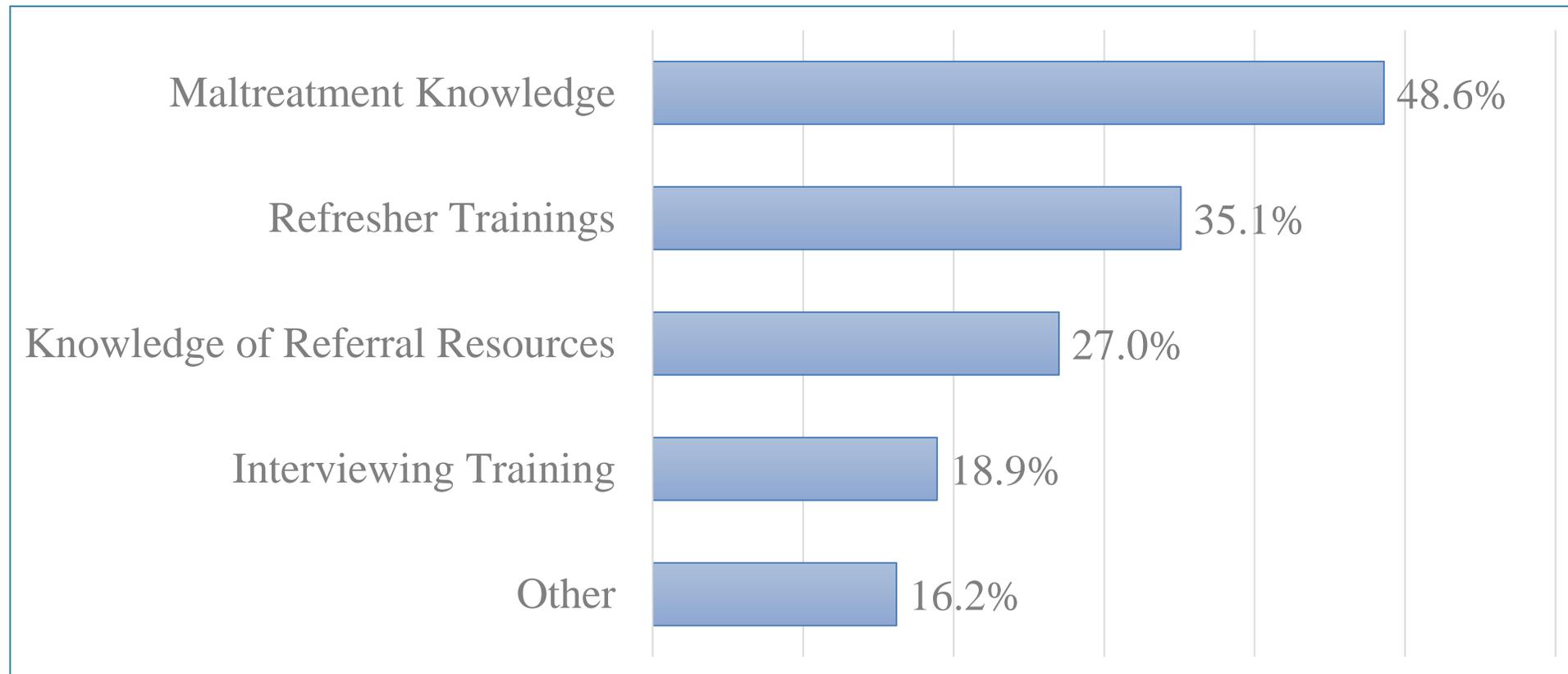
Training Needs

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.

$N = 19$ (Mage = 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).

Canadian law enforcement perceptions of older adult maltreatment, interviewing practices and training needs

Joshua Wyman[1] · Roba ElSaleh[1] · Cassandre Dion Larivière[2] · Lindsay Malloy[2]

Abstract
The current mixed methods study was designed to develop improved insight into the training and evidence-gathering needs of Canadian law enforcement during criminal investigations involving older adult victims and witnesses. Canadian law enforcement professionals ($N = 19$) were interviewed about their perceptions of older adult maltreatment, interview practices, training needs, and societal and public policy recommendations. These professionals also completed questionnaires that assessed their self-reported experience and training supporting older adult victims, their knowledge of older adult maltreatment risk factors and memory aging processes, and their general attitudes towards the older adult population. During the qualitative interview, most participants reported using contextual (e.g., interviewing witness in their home) and question-specific accommodations with older adults, along with pre-interview (e.g., rapport-building), free-recall, and truth-induction practices. Participants discussed specific older adult health, cognitive, emotional and socio-cultural (e.g., generational differences in maltreatment perceptions) factors that can impact an older adult's risk for maltreatment, the interviewing process, and the reporting of abuse and/or neglect. Participants expressed a need for more training pertaining to older adult-specific disabilities, as well as improved multidisciplinary collaboration and practices for interviewing this population. Furthermore, participants discussed their perceptions of the common risk factors, perpetrators, and reporting barriers in cases of older adult maltreatment, as well as their societal and public policy recommendations for improving the safety of vulnerable older adults. Key directions for future research, along with professional law enforcement practice and training recommendations, will be discussed.

Keywords Older adults · Police interviewing · Maltreatment · Dementia · Public policy

The significance of addressing older adult (OA) maltreatment in contemporary society cannot be overstated. The OA population is among the fastest growing in many countries around the world (World Health Organization 2022). Older adults face unique age-related challenges that place them at elevated risk of being victims and witnesses of crimes (Yon et al. 2017) and complicate the law enforcement response to these crimes. Considerable literature to date has focused on identifying the risk factors for OA maltreatment in healthcare settings (see Storey 2020, for a review); however, there is comparatively less literature that discusses how law enforcement can effectively support OA victims of these highly prevalent, but rarely reported, crimes (Wyman & Malloy 2024).

Investigative interviews play a crucial role in criminal investigations of maltreatment, especially when there is limited physical evidence or a lack of bystander witnesses. Existing best practice police interviewing guidelines have been developed for the general child (e.g., NICHD protocol; Orbach et al. 2000) and adult (e.g., Achieving Best Evidence Guidelines; Ministry of Justice 2022) populations. Although these guidelines include interviewing questions and strategies that are relevant to OA eyewitnesses (e.g., rapport building and free-recall questions), these guidelines do not address some of the unique characteristics and needs of this considerably heterogeneous population. Older adults are more likely than younger adults to experience physical (e.g., hearing, vision and mobility challenges) and cognitive (e.g., memory and language) challenges that can impact their abilities to effectively report their experienced maltreatment and respond to standard police interviewing questions (see

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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.

- Mage = 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
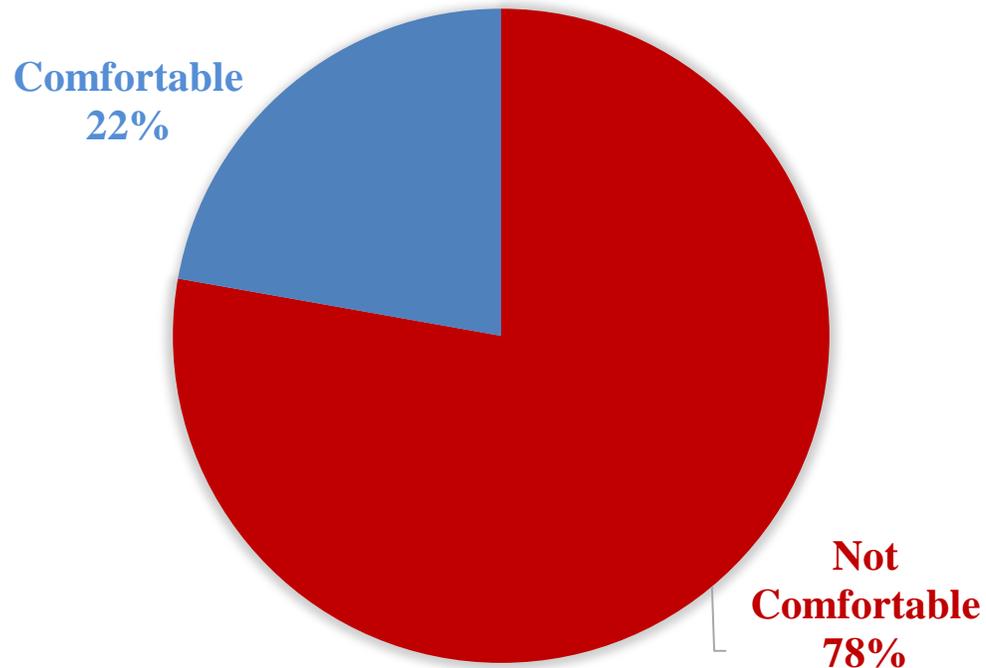
Older Adult Interviewing Confidence
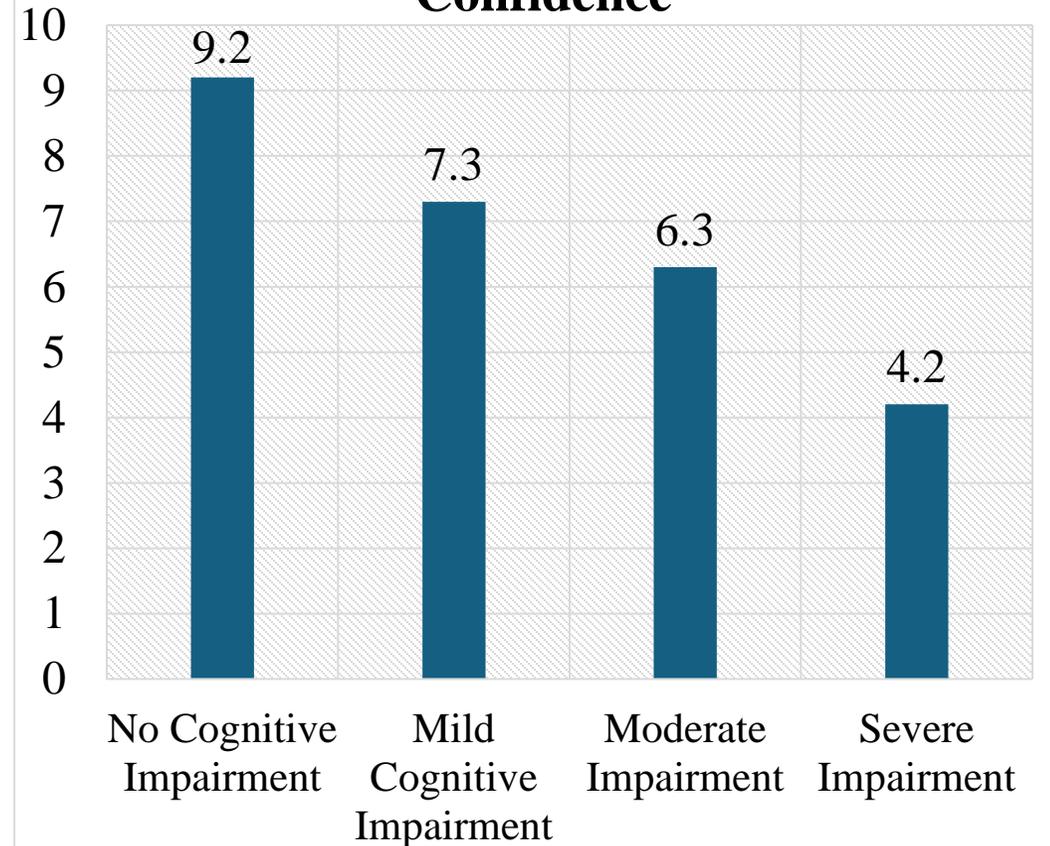
Training Background & Confidence

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 <u>worse</u> 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.

Memory Recall: Older Adults with Dementia

Older adults with dementia perform relatively <u>lower</u> 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 <u>fluctuate</u> 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 responsivity
- 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).

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

Joshua Wyman[a] (iD) and Lindsay Malloy[b]

[a]Department of Psychology, King's University College at Western University, London, ON, Canada; [b]Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ontario Tech University, Oshawa, ON, Canada

The current article provides a contemporary review of the best practices for interviewing older adults about crimes they witnessed or experienced. Specifically, we provide a detailed overview of how investigators can use a range of interviewing adaptations and procedures to acquire detailed and accurate maltreatment disclosures from older adults. In addition to discussing well-established investigative interviewing practices (e.g. rapport building, free-recall, cognitive instructions and prompts), this article also summarizes more recent literature on the benefits of multidisciplinary investigations, use of assistive technology and interview accommodations, along with effective practices for working with minority and marginalized older adults. Lastly, several research, professional and policy recommendations are provided for supporting older adults during investigative interviews.

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 <u>more time</u> 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.

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

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.

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

Interview Practices to Avoid

- Leading and/or suggestive questions.
- Multiple questions.
- Overly broad questions.
- Unsupportive demeanor.
- Confrontations.
- Blaming the victim.
- Overly long interviews.
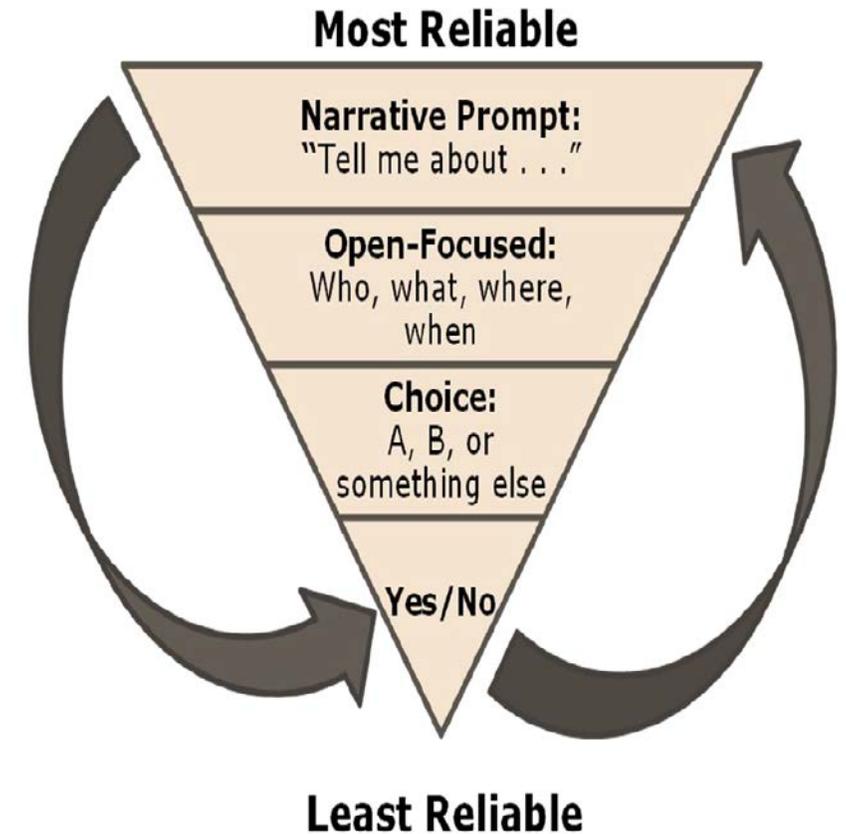
(Government of Western Australia, 2023; Modell Consulting Group, 2024; Wyman & Malloy, 2024)

Most Reliable

Narrative Prompt: "Tell me about . . ."

Open-Focused: Who, what, where, when

Choice: A, B, or something else

Yes/No

Least Reliable

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

Best Practice Interviewing Guidelines
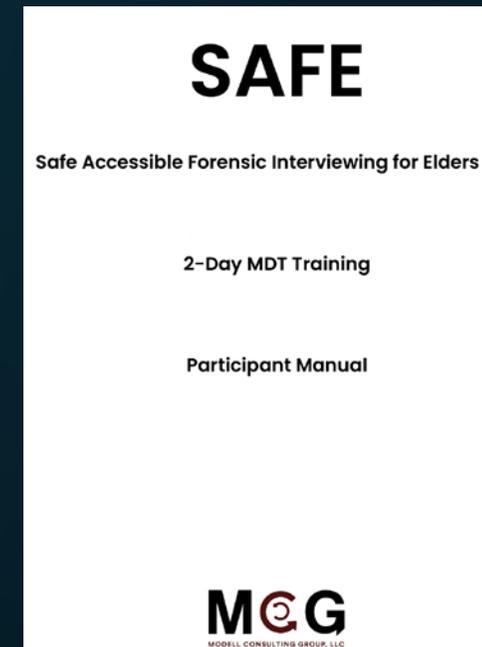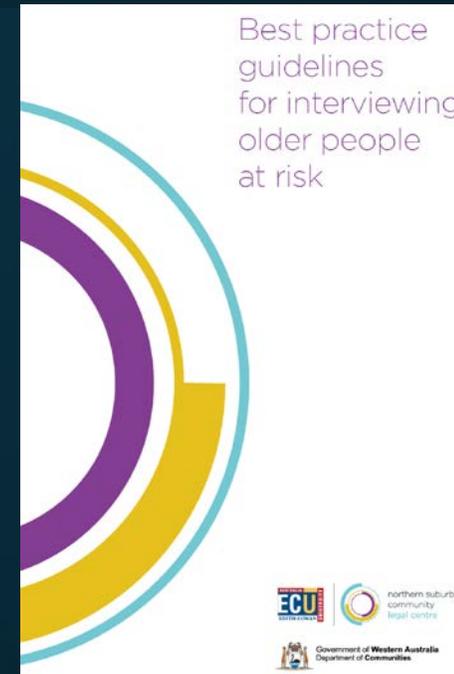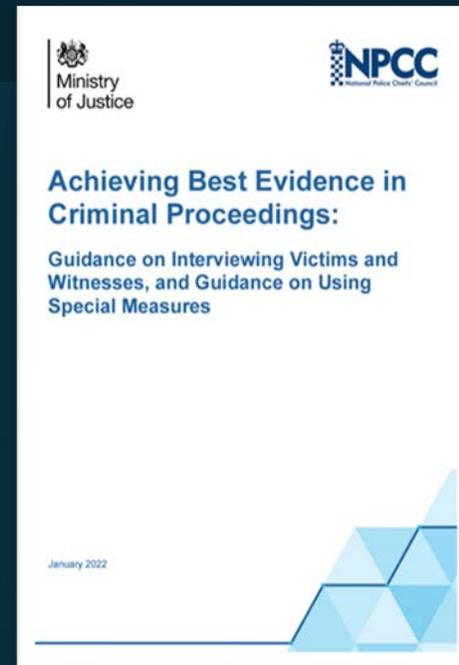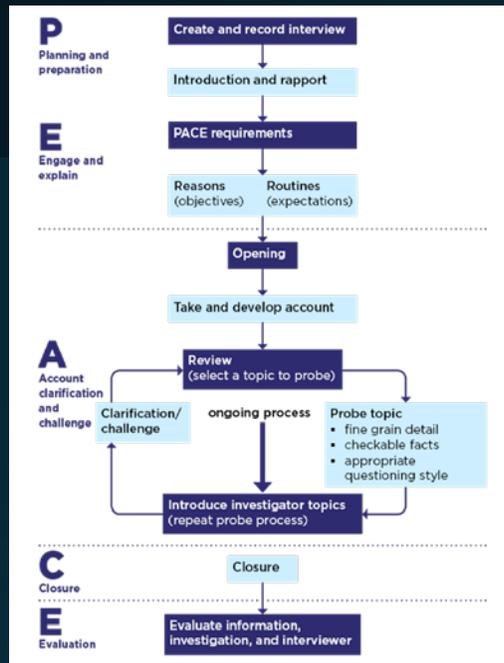
Key Takeaways

1. **Health and law enforcement professionals in Ontario have expressed an important need for <u>improved training and resources</u> 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.
   - <u>Planning in advance</u> 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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