Law Enforcement: Building Stronger Cases with Elder Abuse Multidisciplinary Teams

Elder abuse is a complex crime requiring a multidisciplinary response. Elder abuse multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) are often comprised of law enforcement, adult protective services (APS), medical professionals, prosecutors, psychologists, and other specialists who meet on a regular basis to review cases. Law enforcement builds stronger cases when working with professionals on an MDT.

How MDTs can Aid Law Enforcement’s Criminal Investigations

**Consent**

Consent, to give permission for something to happen, plays a role in many crimes, including elder abuse. Examples may include giving someone permission to access your bank account, to have sex with you, or to refuse life-sustaining services. Consent must be given freely to be valid. There are several actions that undermine consent:

- [ ] Undue influence
- [ ] Coercion
- [ ] Misrepresentation
- [ ] Fraud
- [ ] Diminished decision-making capacity

If any of these conditions is present, consent was not freely given, and a crime may have been committed. Work with your MDT to understand how consent was given.

**Decision-Making Capacity**

All adults have the right to make their own decisions. Decision-making capacity refers to whether an individual has the ability to adequately make a specific decision, in this context, to consent. Decision-making capacity is complex and situational. For instance, someone who can make medical decisions may struggle to make financial decisions. MDTs often have an expert in decision-making capacity. Work with your MDT to obtain additional information needed to determine whether a crime has been committed.

**Dig Deeper**

When elder abuse reports come to law enforcement, they are often assumed to be civil offenses. Digging deeper may reveal that crimes have been committed. For example:

- A business dispute may turn out to be a case of fraud.
- A guardian or power of attorney may be financially exploiting an older adult.
- Real estate transactions could be completed without consent.
- A romantic relationship may involve undue influence.

**Collaboration**

Work with your MDT to obtain additional information needed to understand whether a crime has been committed. When law enforcement and adult protective services (APS) collaborate through an MDT, they may develop:

- stronger working relationships
- more effective communication about cases
- a better understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities
- more efficient and effective case resolution