

A General Field Theory of Elder Abuse: It's Not Rocket Science, It's Harder

USC Judith D. Tamkin Symposium on Elder
Abuse

“Theory-Informed Research: Advancing Knowledge
for Prevention and Intervention”

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The Next 20 Minutes

- **Why is “Theory” Important**
- **Some Used & Useful Theories**
- **Two Significant Problems & Another Look at Theoretical and Substantive Approaches**
- **So What’s Next?**

Elder Mistreatment: Using Theory in Research

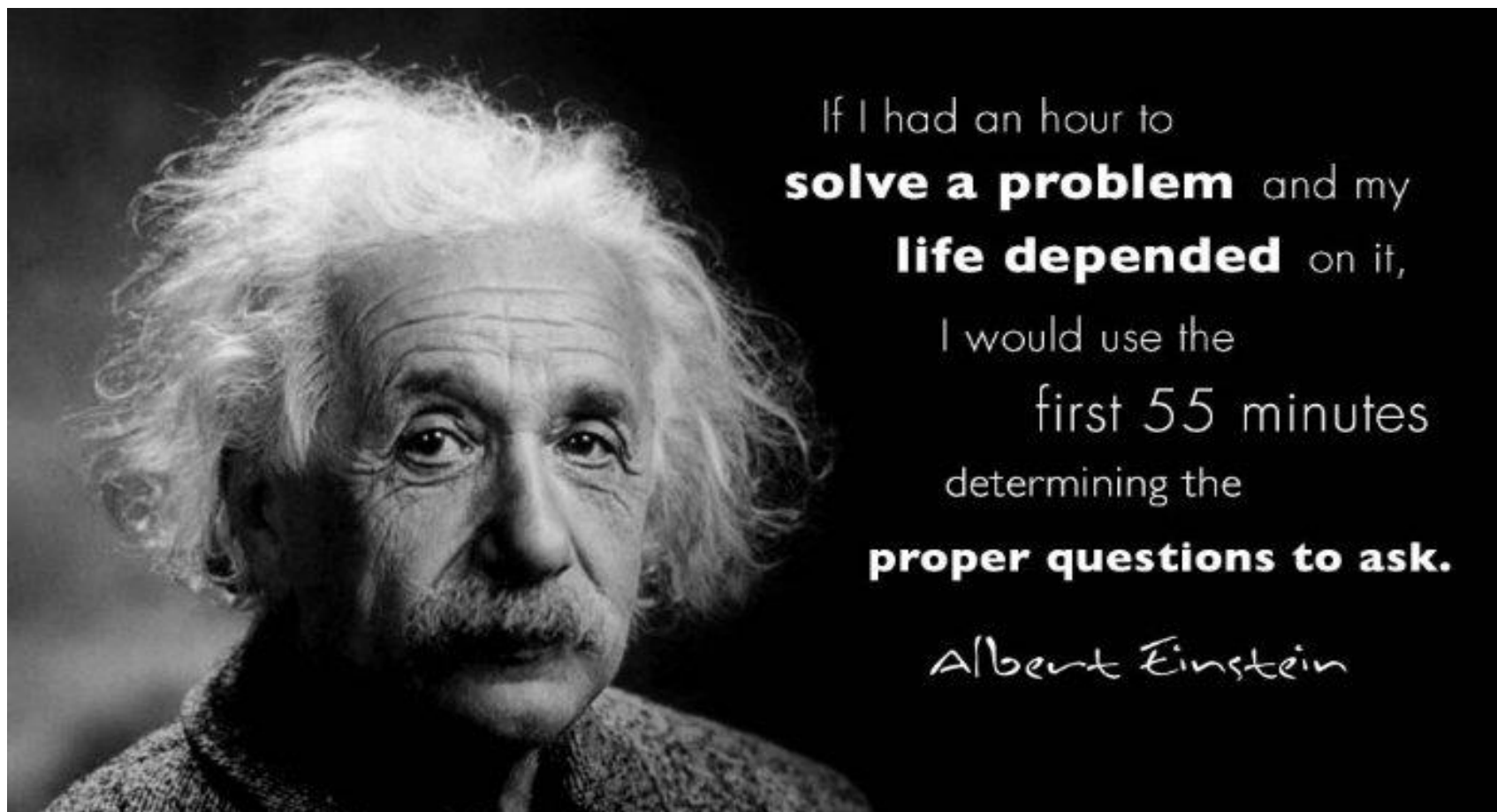
Meeting Summary

Monday, June 2, 2014

National Institute of Justice

Patrick Henry Building, Washington, DC

<https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/elder-abuse/Documents/elder-mistreatment-theory-meeting-summary.pdf>



If I had an hour to
solve a problem and my
life depended on it,

I would use the
first 55 minutes
determining the
proper questions to ask.

Albert Einstein

Theory Consists of Inter-related:

- **Concepts**
- **Definitions**
- **Propositions or Hypotheses**
- **(and if we're lucky) Operationalizations**

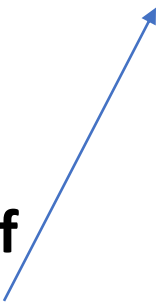
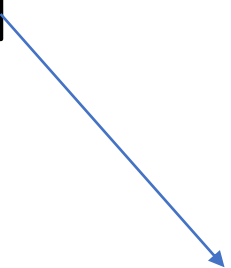
...and it has to be empirically testable!!

Theory is NOT Static

[Research]

[Observation]

[Off the top of
your head]



Theory → Hypotheses → Research → Theory → Hypotheses → Research →

VERY Brief Survey of Elder Abuse Theories

- **Used directly:**
 - ✓ **Caregiver stress**
 - ✓ **Ecological theory**
 - ✓ **Life course perspective**
 - ✓ **NAS “trusted other”**
 - ✓ **Risk Factor based theory**
- **Borrowed from:**
 - ✓ **Child abuse**
 - ✓ **Intimate partner violence**
 - ✓ **Public health**

Significant Problems

- 1. Elder Abuse is an INTERACTIVE PHENOMENON: “Takes two to tangle”**

A Theory Worth Exploring?

Social Exchange Theory

- Incorporates older adult and perpetrator (risk factors)
- Central properties self-interest in meeting needs of each “actor”
- Emphasis on the inter-dependence of actors
- Unit of analysis is the relationship

Significant Problems

- 1. Elder Abuse is an INTERACTIVE PHENOMENON: “Takes two to tangle”**
- 2. Elder Abuse is NOT a SINGLE, MONOLITHIC BEHAVIOR**

Markov Chain Approach to Polyvictimization

$$P_{(\text{neglect})} = \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{emotional})} + \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{physical})} + \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{financial})} + \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{sexual})}$$

--or--

$$P_{(\text{financial})} = \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{neglect})} + \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{physical})} + \text{Occurrence}_{(\text{emotional})}$$

--or--

118 other permutations



Thank you.