

# Elder Abuse – Questions and Answers

## **Q. What is elder abuse?**

**A.** Any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older adult. This includes physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or medication abuse as well as passive or active neglect.

## **Q. How prevalent is elder abuse?**

**A.** The most recent self-reported data on the prevalence of abuse against older adults comes from the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization conducted in 1999 by Statistics Canada. The GSS interviewed more than 4000 older Canadians about their experiences regarding emotional and financial abuse. In total, approximately 7% of seniors reported that they had experienced some form of emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, caregiver or spouse in the five-year period preceding the survey. This equated to approximately **5,700** Edmonton seniors. Additionally, in 2003, an Alberta omnibus survey showed that 18% of the 800 Albertans contacted knew a senior who experienced abuse.

Elder abuse is a growing problem. In 2000, 'Alberta for All Ages' reported: Between 1999 & 2016 the Alberta senior's population will increase 60-70%, while the general population will only grow by 30%.

## **Q. Why does elder abuse happen?**

**A.** Unresolved family conflicts or abusive family interaction patterns are often at the root of elder abuse. Such patterns could be continuations of spousal abuse, or cases of offspring who were abused as children and who are now abusing their dependant parents.

Negative attitudes toward elderly people in general may contribute to their abuse. The common view of older people as feeble, forgetful and dependent weakens inhibitions against abusing them.

Addiction issues like gambling, drugs or alcohol on the part of the abuser or the abused can also be a factor contributing to abuse.

Lack of understanding of the aging process by caregivers and professionals leads to unreasonable expectations being placed on elderly people. This leads to frustration, which can increase the risk of abuse.

Stress is frequently cited as a contributing factor to abuse, particularly in families caring for dependent elderly people. Few families are prepared for the emotional and/or economic responsibility of caring for elderly relatives for a prolonged period.

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## **Q. Who are the abused?**

**A.** It can be any older adult! In 2006, the Edmonton Elder Abuse Intervention Team received 1099 calls for service. Based on the information collected on those referrals, the following was noted:

- 68% of the clients were female.
- 32% of the clients were male.

The most common abuse identified was emotional (59%) followed by financial (54%) and physical abuse (33%).

## **Q. Who are the abusers?**

**A.** It can be anyone – Often it is a close family member!

- Often lives with the abused person or knows them well
- Has control and influence over the older adult
- May have addictions or mental health history
- May have grown up in a violent and abusive environment

Based on the EAIT 2006 Statistics the abuser was most often:

- Son (38%)
- Spouse (16%)
- Daughter (13%)

16% of the time a secondary abuser was identified (daughter-in-law, son-in-law, son, daughter or caregiver were named)

## **Q. Why do may victims not report the abuse?**

**A.** The victim is often isolated and may conceal the situation for a variety of reasons including:

- Fear of retaliation by the abuser,
- Fear of being institutionalized
- Love for the abuser (often a family member or close relative).

Victims often wish to protect the abuser from consequence and live with the hope that things will change. Additionally, the victim often believes they have done something to warrant the abuse, which results in them feeling they are to blame. Shame and embarrassment are other reasons why a victim is hesitant to report the abuse; they may not want others to know about their family problems.

## **Q. What are the indicators of abuse?**

**A.** One of the difficulties in identifying cases of elder abuse is in making the connection between the impairment of the physical and mental condition of an elderly person and the possibility of maltreatment. Some of the general indicators include: fear, denial, rationalization, and a change in level of care or a

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change in regular patterns of activity. It is important to remember that the presence of any one or more indicator does not necessarily imply that abuse is taking place: it means that further assessment / investigation is required.

## **Q. What help is available?**

**A.** *When the abuse is against the law (i.e. theft, assault, etc.) the police are the most appropriate resource and should be contacted immediately.*

In Edmonton there are several community resources that can assist in addressing the issue of elder abuse. Some of these include:

- **Seniors Abuse HelpLine 454 - 8888**
- Elder Abuse Intervention Team – **Intake 477 - 2929**
- Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing – **Intake 702 - 1520**
- Protection for Persons in Care – **1-888-357-9339**

## **Q. What is the Seniors' Abuse Help Line?**

**A.** A phone line answered 24 hours daily by trained volunteers who provide confidential & anonymous support, information and referrals on elder abuse matters. This service is a collaborative effort between the Seniors Association of the Greater Edmonton Area (SAGE), the Elder Abuse Intervention Team and The Support Network (TSN). The United Way provides funding to support the initiative.

## **Q. Who is the Elder Abuse Intervention Team?**

**A.** The Elder Abuse Intervention Team (EAIT) is a collaborative effort between the City of Edmonton Community Services, the Edmonton Police Service, Victorian Order of Nurses and Catholic Social Services. EAIT provides intervention; including education, support & referral services for older adults who are at risk of or are experiencing elder abuse. Consultation is provided to others working with seniors experiencing abuse. Also works towards prevention through raising awareness, community development and education to professionals & student bodies.

## **Q. What is Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing?**

**A.** A program of the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE). Provides free, safe housing for up to 60 days. Suites are furnished and include meals and basic necessities. Day staff provide information, support and assistance as needed, including finances, transportation, housing, life skills etc. Health assessments & basic health needs are provided by VON (Victorian Order of Nurses).

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## **Q. What is Protection for Persons in Care?**

**A.** Protection for Persons in Care investigates reports of abuse or safety concerns for adults in publicly funded care facilities including hospitals, seniors' lodges and nursing homes. The Protection for Persons in Care Act, enacted in 1998, makes it a requirement to report any suspicion of abuse to a toll-free reporting line or local police authorities.

## **Q. As a community member what can you do?**

**A.**

- ♦ Support efforts to increase community awareness of elder abuse
- ♦ Promote positive attitudes towards elderly people
- ♦ Become aware of and support agencies who provide services for elderly people and their care-givers
- ♦ Support the training of individuals, both professionals and the general public, to detect signs of possible abuse.
- ♦ Stay connected or get connected with seniors in your life or neighborhood. Seniors experiencing abuse or neglect (including self neglect) are often isolated in the community – no one is aware of their plight and they have few opportunities to share their concerns.
- ♦ If a person tells you about abuse listen, take them seriously, reassure them that they are not alone in dealing with this issue and support them to connect with community services.

**For more information on Elder Abuse:** Call the EAIT at 477 – 2929 or visit

<http://www.police.edmonton.ab.ca/Pages/Elder/ElderAbuse.htm>