

Elder Abuse

In recognition of June 15th as Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the ESPC has prepared a general fact sheet on the issue. The issue of elder abuse is not new, and the community has been responding to incidents for many years. Building on previous community efforts as well as recommendations in the mid 1980's, a movement started to develop a community response to elder abuse. Increasing awareness and enhancement and development of services has led to a collaborative, coordinated community response.

Elder Abuse is...

"...an action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of an older adult. This includes the denial of an adult's fundamental rights according to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The abusers are commonly family members and this type of abuse is termed family violence. Abuse occurring in a care facility is termed institutional abuse." (Source: *Intervention Tool – Abuse and Neglect of an Older or Vulnerable Person*, Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network)

Categories of Elder Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Any action or statement that causes emotional anguish, fears, diminished self-esteem or dignity. Examples include threats to do harm, disrespect for privacy, belongings or pets, and derogatory comments about the adult. *Signs to look out for include:* fear, anxiety, depression, withdrawal, covering, secretiveness, fearful interaction with a caregiver, caregiver speaking on behalf of a person and not allowing privacy, and physical signs of isolation including no telephone, visitors or T.V.

Physical Abuse

Any action that causes physical discomfort, pain or injury. Examples include pushing, hitting, poking, slapping, forcible restraint and rough handling. *Signs to look out for include:* unexplained injuries – bruises, burns or bites in various stages of healing, missing hair, bleeding scalp from hair pulling, untreated medical problems and history of injuries.

Sexual Abuse

Any unwanted sexual behaviour including sexual comments, exploitive use of pornography, fondling or sexual assault. *Signs to look out for include:* pain bruises or bleeding in the genital or chest area, STD's, recent depression and recent incontinence of stool or urine.

Medical Abuse

The intentional or unintentional misuse of medications and prescriptions such as withholding or providing doses that cause bodily harm, sedating or other adverse effects. *Signs to look out for include:* changes in mental ability or physical activity and a decline in general health status including confusion, poor balance, gait disturbance, falling, depression, recent incontinence and/or agitation.

Neglect

The failure to provide basic or personal care needs. Examples include food, water, shelter, hygiene, clothing, physical aids, exercise and social interaction, attention, supervision if required, health care, and a safe environment. Active neglect is the intentional failure of the caregiver to fulfill their care giving responsibilities. Passive neglect is the unintentional failure of a caregiver to fulfill their care giving responsibilities because of a lack of knowledge, skill, illness, infirmity or lack of awareness of community supports and resources. Self neglect is a person's inability to provide for his or her own essential needs. *Signs to look out for include:* unkempt appearance, inappropriate or dirty clothing, poor personal hygiene, dehydration, unhealthy living conditions (dangerous and/or in disrepair), lack of social contact, irregular medical appointments, lack of or poor condition of dentures, glasses and hearing aids.

Financial Abuse

Theft or exploitation of a person's money, property or assets. Examples include interference in making own financial decisions, frequent requests for money, being pressured to sign papers, forgery, and misuse of Power of Attorney. *Signs to look out for include:* standard of living not in keeping with income or assets, theft of property, unusual or inappropriate activity in bank accounts, forged signatures on financial documents, coercion used in signing a will or releasing property, overdue bills, limiting senior's access to their personal bank account.



Prevalence of Elder Abuse

According to data compiled from 149 police services across Canada, in 2006:

- ◆ A total of 6,033 incidents of violence against older adults were reported. Family members were the accused in 34 percent of these incidents.
- ◆ Older adult victims of family-related violence were more likely to report being victimized by an adult child (32 percent) or current or former spouse (30 percent).
- ◆ Among older adult victims of family-related violence, more than half (53 percent) of both male and female victims experienced common assault. About 20 percent experienced threats, and 14 percent experienced major assault.

Source: *Abuse of Older Adults: Department of Justice Canada Overview Paper* (June 2009).

According to Bernice Sewell from the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton which operated the Edmonton Seniors Safe House:

- ◆ 7 to 8% of all seniors experience abuse.
- ◆ About 75% of seniors suffering from abuse are female. The remaining 25% are male.
- ◆ In 2009, their Safe House was at 96% capacity.
- ◆ About 50% of their clients came from ethnic backgrounds.
- ◆ 85% of clients at the safe house moved on to safer environments (the remainder went to place such as the hospital).

According to Pat Power of the Edmonton Elder Abuse Intervention Team, the Team receives over 1200 calls per year related to consults or live cases of abuse.

What You Should Know About Elder Abuse

- ◆ Often the abuser may be moody or angry
- ◆ It often increases in frequency and severity over time
- ◆ Some people deny they are being abused because they think they are to blame for another person's angry behaviour
- ◆ If a close relative or friend abuses you, you do not need to feel ashamed. It is not your fault; it is controlling behaviour.

Source: *Elder Abuse - What it Is? What can be done about it?* Edmonton Community Action Committee on Elder Abuse, 2004

Community Resources

Edmonton Seniors Safe Housing (780) 702-1520

- ◆ 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 and basic health needs are provided by Victorian Order of Nurses.
- ◆ Criteria: Seniors or senior couples, age 60+ who need to leave an abusive situation. Must be able to live independently.

Seniors Abuse HelpLine (780) 454-8888

- ◆ A phone line answered 24 hours daily by trained volunteers at the Support Network, who provide confidential and anonymous support, information and referrals on elder abuse.
- ◆ Criteria: Seniors experiencing abuse or anyone concerned about a senior that may be experiencing abuse.

Elder Abuse Intervention Team (780) 477-2929

- ◆ Provides intervention, education, support and 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 has a prevention focus: raising awareness, community development and education to professionals and student bodies.
- ◆ Criteria: Seniors aged 65 or older residing within Edmonton; elder abuse is identified or suspected; the abuser is a family member or unrelated caregiver.

Elder Adult Resource Services, Catholic Social Services (780) 477-2929

- ◆ This program provides support, counseling, education, and referral services for older adults who are at risk of or are being abused and neglected.

Call **911** if it is an emergency. Do not hesitate to call the police if assistance is required.

Call **Edmonton Police Service Dispatch Line** (780) 423-4567 to discuss your concern with a police officer. The police will assist if an abuser must be removed from the home.

Call **Protection for Persons in Care** 1-800-3579339 to report abuse in a care facility.