



Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies



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families

ELDER ABUSE NATIONAL
RESEARCH
STAGE ONE – STRENGTHENING
THE EVIDENCE BASE

Component one—Developing an
Australian definition of abuse of
older people

Presentation to the 5th National
Elder Abuse Conference
19 February 2018





The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and may not reflect the views of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Australian Government or the National Ageing Research Institute.

Presentation overview

1. Background research leading to the Elder Abuse National Research.
2. Outline of the Elder Abuse National Research project.
3. Focus on Component 1: Methodology
4. Focus on Component 1: Preliminary findings
5. Discussion of the proposed definition
6. Where to from here?
 - a. Testing proposed definition;
 - b. Submission of final report for Component 1.



1. Background to the Elder Abuse National Research Project

- *AIFS Elder abuse: Understanding issues, frameworks and responses (2016);*
- *AIFS Elder Abuse Prevalence Scoping Study (2017);* and
- *ALRC Inquiry into protecting the rights of older Australians from abuse – Final report: Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response (2017).*

2. Outline of the Elder Abuse National Research Project



The EANR project includes three interlinked components:

1. The development of an Australian definition to apply in research (AIFS and NARI).
2. The development of instruments for assessing the prevalence and nature of abuse experienced by older people (SRC).
3. The analysis of existing quantitative datasets held by the ABS and selected administrative datasets to assess existing evidence about the prevalence and nature of abuse experienced by older people (SPRC).



2. Outline of the Elder Abuse National Research Project

This definition from this component one is intended to be used for **research purposes**:

- To facilitate and advance the knowledge base about the occurrence and consequences of a range of different acts and omissions that **may** constitute abuse of older people.
- While this definition will support further thinking about policy, practice and legal responses it is **not** a definition for practice or legal purposes.
- Core purpose of this definition: to support further research and measurement of abuse of older people as a phenomenon in the population.



3. Focus on Component 1 – Methodology (1)

1. Data collection via:
 - workshops and interviews with professionals who are involved in organisations or peak bodies concerns with ageing or elder abuse;
 - focus groups and interviews with individuals concerned with ageing/abuse of older people to gain a non-professional perspective, including with representatives of, or service providers to CALD, LGBTI and ATSI communities.
2. Consideration of existing evidence and analysis of data collected to develop thinking about the scope of elements for the definition and to test their exclusionary or inclusionary effects.



3. Focus on Component 1 – Methodology (2)

Recruitment measures and sample:

- Invitations for the professional workshops across states/territories were sent to nearly 200 professionals from over 100 organisations:
 - 78 professionals attended seven workshops (approx. 2.5 hours duration) conducted around the country in November and December 2017.
- Invitations for focus groups were sent to approximately 100 individuals and expressions of interest were received via stakeholders:
 - Four focus groups (approx. 2 hours duration) were attended by 35 individuals.



3. Focus on Component 1 – Methodology (3)

Recruitment measures and sample:

- Focus groups included:
 - Tasmania and Victoria: Carers, service providers, older people
 - WA: LGBTI
 - Victoria: CALD
- Interviews with small number of stakeholders unable to attend workshops and focus groups and with ATSI service providers.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Preliminary findings

What is meant by the terms “elder” and “elder abuse” and are they fit for purpose?

- Identification of potential for term to capture the broad range of issues causing concern about the treatment of older people;
- Shared understanding of the key issues of concern captured by the term “elder abuse”;
- Growing recognition of the term in Australia and acknowledgement of its use in international context;
- BUT clearly articulated reservations about the use of the term “elder”, particularly in relation to its application to ATSI communities.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Elements of the definition (1)

1. The person who experiences the behaviour:

- Mixed views as to whether the definition should include an age limit.
- Preference for age to be one of a range of factors informing this element.
- Preference for the definition to be inclusive rather than exclusive and for this element not to operate as a barrier to inclusion (eg., age as a guide rather than pre-requisite).
- Mixed views re inclusion of term “vulnerability” in definition.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Elements of the definition (2)

2. The act or omission:

- Broad range of acts/omissions nominated and reflecting a “rights-based” perspective:
 - physical abuse; emotional abuse; financial abuse (including scamming); sexual abuse; threats/intimidation; neglect/passive abuse; social isolation;
 - restrictive practices; including pharmaceutical abuse—over/under medication;
 - breach of rights including denial of identity (e.g., gender, sexual, spiritual or cultural) or denial of self-determination;
 - technological abuse; and
 - systemic abuse (e.g., ageist attitudes or lack of adequate services including health care and housing).
- Intention not required but characterised by exercise of “power and control”.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Elements of the definition (3)

3. The person who engages in the behaviour:

- Broad range of perpetrators nominated including spouses and other family members, friends, carers, neighbours, professionals and other service providers
- Most distinguished in some way between these parties and those who were strangers to the relevant older person
BUT range of distinguishing factors included:
 - a relationship of trust;
 - an expectation of trust (which need not be long standing) or
 - an imbalance of power.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Elements of the definition (4)

4. **Situational preconditions:**

- Most participants identified the situational preconditions of an expectation or relationship of trust or an imbalance of power as a requirement for a definition.
- Question of a relationship or expectation of trust and connection to the presence of a power imbalance or dependence due to age-related (or other) vulnerabilities were also prominent features of discussion.
- What constitutes a relationship is a grey area but it need not be longstanding: e.g., could extend to a service provider that the older person has only had a brief interaction.



4. Focus on Component 1 – Elements of the definition (5)



5. Consequences:

- Participants in most workshops and focus groups articulated consequences reflecting the multi-dimensional concept of harm.
- In addition to identifying a broad range of potential forms of harm, some participants also indicated that the harm should not be required to
 - be apparent to the older person or
 - for it to occur contemporaneously with the act/s or omission/s in order for it to qualify as harm as defined.



5. Discussion of draft proposed definition

Considering the purpose of the definition (for research) and the consultation findings, a suggested definition is:

The abuse of older people includes:

*a single or repeated **act or failure to act**, including threats, that result in **harm or distress** to an **older person**. This occurs where there is a **relationship or an expectation of trust** and where there is a power imbalance between **the party responsible** and the older person.*

6. Where to from here?

Next steps:

This is an iterative process:

- Test the draft proposed definition against case studies;
- Feedback from stakeholders including Technical Advisory Group;
- Submit Draft report and consult with our AGD officers;
- Interactive presentation at the 5th National Elder Abuse Conference, Sydney 19 February 2018; and
- Finalise Report to AGD.



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