

**5<sup>th</sup> National Elder  
Abuse Conference**  
*Together Making  
Change.*

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Sydney

***THEME:***  
***Socially  
disadvantaged  
and vulnerable  
older people***

# **CAN ELDER ABUSE INDICATORS ENABLE ABUSE PREVENTION & EFFECTIVE RESPONSE?**

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***Acknowledgement:***  
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## CONTEXT:

**Maltreatment of 'elderly people'** was identified in 2011 by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global public health issue despite little being known then about the scope of abuses because of low reporting and little research

**Increased research interest in elder abuse prevention since then** has produced useful insights on factors that enable resilience and deter abuse in certain circumstances

## **We are now fairly certain that:**

**Ageism within families and societies enables all types of abuse** of older adults – which is accepted as normal and therefore not remarkable.

**Inept responses** to trauma and abuse trivializes the traumatic experience of abused older adults and undermines their human and civil rights.

**Professionals and others in direct contact with possible victims of abuse** can inadvertently vindicate abuse by extending sympathy to abusers and uncritical acceptance of their narratives about the person.

# UNDERSTANDING FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ABUSE RISK

Any criminal act is enabled by opportunity and motive. Whether the act is perpetrated or not is moderated by the risk and consequences of being caught

$$\text{DECISION TO ATTACK} = \frac{\text{MOTIVATION} \times \text{OPPORTUNITY}}{\text{CONSEQUENCES OF ACTING OR NOT ACTING}}$$

The strength of each of these factors determines the risk posed to the victim

## MOTIVATION

Difficult to know precisely but may be philosophical and/or emotional:

1. Inequality is considered natural and strength always prevails *Aristotle (384–322 BC)*
2. The desire to dominate the weak is ubiquitous *Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)*
3. Old age is burdensome to the person and others
4. Personal self interest and/or competition for control of resources

# A WINDOW ON WHAT IS HAPPENING OUT THERE:

ALLEGED ABUSE TYPE	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
Financial	1840
Psychological	2134
Neglect	1021
Physical	694
Sexual	46
Social Isolation	564
N/A	48

ALLEGED ABUSE TYPE	NUMBER OF <u>LONE</u> OCCURRENCES OF THAT ABUSE TYPE
Financial	550
Psychological	583
Neglect	260
Physical	145
Sexual	14
Social Isolation	36
N/A	34

	Psychological	Neglect	Physical	Sexual	Social Isolation	N/A
Financial	531	138	33	5	53	1
Psychological		139	202	0	85	3
Neglect			40	4	40	6
Physical				4	5	0
Sexual					0	0
Social Isolation						0

# AGE AND GENDER AS POSSIBLE RISK FACTORS:

## TYPES OF ABUSE

OLDER PERSON GENDER	Number	%
		<b><i>N = 3873</i></b>
Female	2582	<b>70.4</b>
Male	1055	<b>28.8</b>
Unknown	30	0.8
Missing	206	

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSE TARGET


OLDER PERSON GENDER	Number	%
		<b><i>N = 3873</i></b>
Female	2582	<b>70.4</b>
Male	1055	<b>28.8</b>
Unknown	30	0.8
Missing	206	

OLDER PERSON AGE	Number	%
45 – 54	44	1.2
55 – 64	197	5.4
65 – 74	646	<b>17.7</b>
75 – 84	1275	<b>34.9</b>
85 – 94	1081	<b>29.6</b>
95 +	102	2.8
Unknown	313	8.6
Missing	215	

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# WHO IS REPORTING THESE ALLEGED ATTACKS?

## CALLER RELATIONSHIP WITH OLDER PERSON

ALLEGED ABUSER RELATIONSHIP WITH OLDER PERSON 	Concerned	Family	Older Person	Service	TOTAL
	Other	Member		Provider	
Daughter	116 (114)	449 (364)	126 (148)	164 (229)	856
Daughter -in-Law	2 (5)	13 (17)	13 (7)	11 (10)	39
Friend	40 (25)	72 (83)	22 (34)	60 (52)	194
Grandchild	10 (18)	65 (59)	12 (24)	51 (37)	138
Informal Carer	12 (7)	15 (21)	5 (8)	17 (15)	49
Neighbour	31 (26)	29 (83)	113 (33)	21 (52)	194
Not known to OP	4 (10)	21 (32)	34 (13)	16 (20)	75
Other Relative	24 (22)	7 (70)	19 (28)	43 (44)	164
Sibling	13 (6)	12 (19)	9 (8)	11 (12)	45
Son	145 (137)	453 (437)	136 (178)	293 (275)	1026
Son-in-Law	7 (8)	23 (27)	21 (11)	12 (17)	63
Spouse/ Partner	41 (60)	182 (192)	48 (78)	181 (121)	452
Worker	13 (18)	49 (59)	36 (24)	40 (37)	138
<b>Total</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>1461</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>3433</b>

# ALLEGED ABUSER VARIABLES TO CONSIDER:

		OLDER PERSON GENDER	
		Female	Male
ALLEGED ABUSER	Females	964 (1072)	525 (417)
	Males	1412 (1304)	399 (507)
TOTAL		2376	924

		ALLEGED ABUSER GENDER		
		Female	Male	Total
ALLEGED ABUSER VARIABLE	Alcohol	48 (66)	133 (115)	181
	Criminal Record	5 (27)	69 (47)	74
	Drugs	67 (68)	121 (120)	188
	Gambling	23 (18)	27 (32)	50
	Mental Health	158 (122)	178 (214)	336
TOTAL		301	528	829

# WHO POSES MORE RISK – SONS OR DAUGHTERS?

<b>ALLEGED ABUSE BY SONS:</b>	<b>of Older Person Female 85 – 94 (n= 257 cases)</b>		<b>of Older Person Male 85 – 94 (n= 76 cases)</b>		<b>Whole Database (n= 3873 cases)</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Financial</b>	<b>153</b>	59.5	<b>50</b>	65.8	1840	47.5
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>161</b>	62.6	<b>43</b>	56.6	2134	55.1
<b>Neglect</b>	<b>94</b>	36.6	<b>20</b>	26.3	1021	26.4
<b>Physical</b>	<b>38</b>	14.8	<b>16</b>	21.1	694	17.9
<b>Sexual</b>	1	0.4	0	0	46	1.1
<b>Social Isolation</b>	47	18.3	17	22.4	564	14.6
<b>ALLEGED ABUSE BY DAUGHTERS:</b>	<b>of Older Person Female 85 – 94 (n= 231 cases)</b>		<b>of Older Person Male 85 – 94 (n= 71 cases)</b>		<b>Whole Database (n= 3873 cases)</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Financial</b>	<b>132</b>	57.1	<b>43</b>	60.6	1840	47.5
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>124</b>	53.7	<b>39</b>	54.9	2134	55.1
<b>Neglect</b>	<b>82</b>	35.5	<b>17</b>	23.9	1021	26.4
<b>Physical</b>	<b>28</b>	12.1	<b>12</b>	16.9	694	17.9
<b>Sexual</b>	0	0	0	0	46	1.1
<b>Social Isolation</b>	41	17.7	14	19.7	564	14.6



# ALLEGED ABUSER VARIABLES TO CONSIDER

		AGE OF ALLEGED ABUSER					
		< 45	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75 - 84	85 - 94
ALLEGED ABUSER VARIABLE	Alcohol	29 (42)	39 (39)	<b>27</b> (25)	<b>16</b> (10)	<b>9</b> (5)	3 (2)
	Criminal Record	<b>21</b> (18)	<b>18</b> (17)	10 (11)	4 (4)	0 (2)	0 (1)
	Drugs	<b>88</b> (50)	36 (47)	24 (31)	0 (12)	0 (7)	0 (2)
	Gambling	10 (14)	12 (13)	8 (8)	9 (3)	0 (2)	1 (1)
	Mental Health Issues	60 (84)	<b>88</b> (78)	<b>58</b> (52)	20 (20)	<b>18</b> (11)	5 (4)

		LIVING WITH OLDER PERSON		
		No	Yes	Total
ALLEGED ABUSER	Daughter	<b>385</b> (344)	449 (490)	834
	Son	366 (407)	<b>622</b> (581)	988
	<b>TOTAL</b>	751	1071	1822

# HIDDEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR ABUSE

ALLEGED ABUSE TYPE:	Sons living with Older Person (622 cases)		Daughters living with Older Person (449 cases)		Whole Database (3873 cases)	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Financial	298	47.9	242	54.9	1840	47.5
Psychological	445	71.5	275	61.2	2134	55.1
Neglect	233	37.5	185	41.2	1021	26.4
Physical	170	27.3	105	23.4	694	17.9
Sexual	3	0.5	0	0	46	1.1
Social Isolation	125	20.1	103	22.9	564	14.6

# DOES ABUSE TYPE CHANGE WITH LOCATION?

REGION	Alleged Abuse Type as % of Total <i>(Can occur jointly with other abuse types)</i>						All Calls % of Total
	Financial	Psycho- logical	Neglect	Physical	Sexual	Social Isolation	
Major City	52.1	57.6	53.8	57.3	37.0	53.7	52.7
Inner Regional	24.9	23.6	22.7	22.8	37.0	26.6	22.1
Outer Regional	9.5	8.5	10.2	7.5	8.7	10.8	8.5
Remote	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.7	0	0.9	0.5
Very Remote	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	2.2	0	0.1
Unknown	13.0	9.8	12.7	11.5	15.2	8.0	16.1
<b>Total Count</b>	1840	2134	1021	694	46	564	3873

# DETERRENCE & PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS

**DECISION TO ATTACK = MOTIVATION X OPPORTUNITY  
CONSEQUENCES OF ACTING OR NOT ACTING**

## CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of attack need to be both **LIKELY** and **SEVERE** for perpetrators.

If elder abuse is formally included in a triptych of trust relationship abuses ie.

- 1. Attacks on children** in public and domestic locations
- 2. Attacks mostly on women in domestic** rather than public locations
- 3. Attacks on older vulnerable people** by those whom they should be able to trust

... then the legal consequences of elder abuse can be made relative to existing frameworks to include mandatory reporting, police investigation, equivalent sentencing and ..... attract a similar intensity of public contempt.

# PROFESSIONAL AND POLICY STRATEGIES TO PREVENT ABUSE

## **Direct approach:**

- assist older adults to be self-determining and autonomous
- reduce social isolation which enables abusers to strike
- support older adults' financial control and financial capability
- assist decision-making re appointing family members as legal representatives

## **Systemic approach:**

Policy supporting closer scrutiny of those who represent older adults is needed:

- Implement and resource abuse monitoring and response systems based on research into prevalence and factors influencing elder abuse
- Review policy frameworks for evidence of 'structural violence' embedded in government and organisational policy that systematically disadvantages older adults in certain circumstances.

**This is an issue for which time for action has come. It is up to us to stop it.**



THANK YOU

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**NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing**