



# BASIC INTRODUCTION II

## THE ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS



The Ontario Network  
**for the Prevention of Elder Abuse**

234 Eglinton Ave East, suite 203,  
Toronto, Ontario, M4P 1K5  
Telephone: (416) 640-7784  
Web Site: [www.onpea.org](http://www.onpea.org)



## AGENDA

- Definitions
- Prevalence
- Forms of Abuse
- Signs / Symptoms of Abuse
- Response to Abuse
- Community Resources
- Video and Case Studies
- Question / Answers

## THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS & FREEDOMS

The Charter provides that:

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.”



## AGEISM

- Discrimination on the basis of age
- Makes assumptions about capability
- Removes decision-making process
- Ignores older person’s known wishes
- Treats older adult as a child

## **ABUSE IS A STRONG WORD, BUT IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE**

Abuse is wrong because:

- It violates a basic right to feel safe
- It is controlling behavior which frightens or intimidates
- It can be illegal

## **ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS WHAT IS IT?**

Any action, or deliberate inaction, by a person in a position of trust which causes harm to an older person.

Adapted from: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002



## **ABUSE**

- Can happen anywhere
- There are 3 common variables:
  - Unequal balance of power
  - Isolation
  - The abuser is quite often dependent on the abused
- Is usually not a one time occurrence
- The problem of the abuse of older adults threatens a growing number of the Canadian population.
- In 2001 people aged 65 years and older made up 13% of the population of Canada (4 million people).

## **ABUSE** cont'd

- In 2026 it is projected that the number of Canadians age 65 and older will be 8 million people, or 21% of the population.
- In 2031 the population of older adults in Ontario is expected to be 3.7 million – 22.3% of the Province's population.
- The majority of older Canadians (95%) were living in private dwellings in 2001.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF ABUSE

Total Population of Older Adults

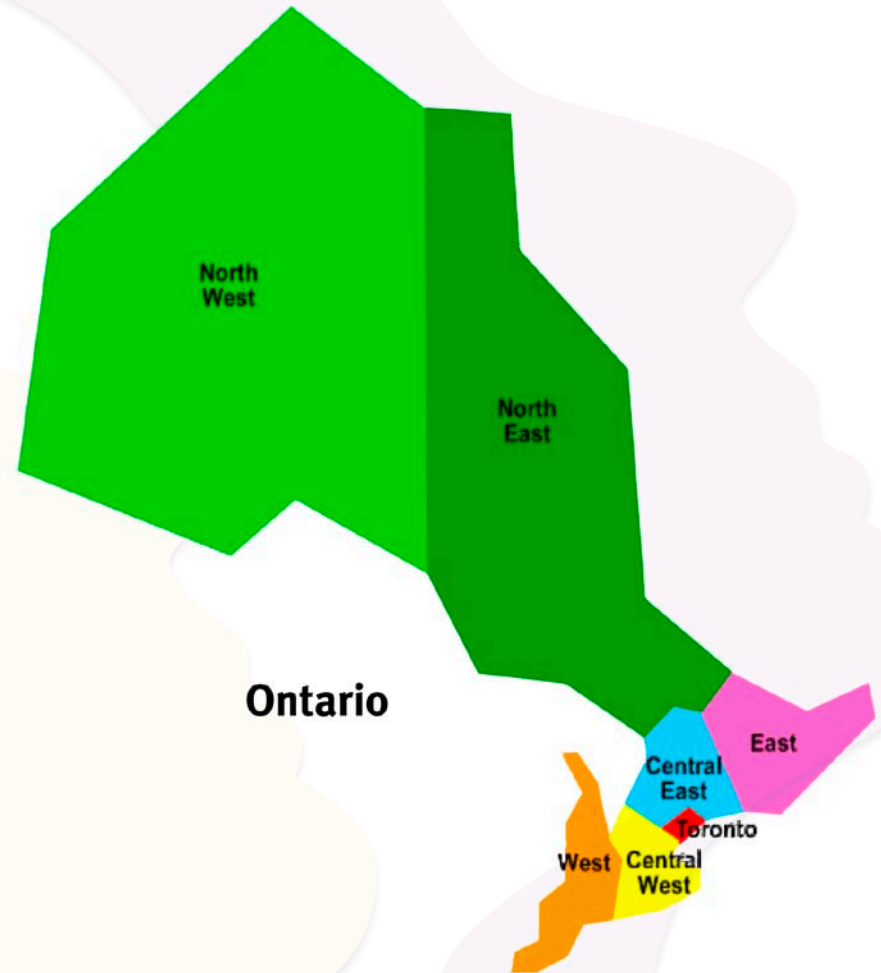
- 1.6 Million

Rate of Abuse of Older Adults

- 2 to 10%

Number of Older Adults Facing Abuse

- 32,000 to 160,000



Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2004 and Lachs & Pillemer; The Lancet, October 2004

## GENERAL SIGNS OF ABUSE

- Sudden changes in behaviour
- Doesn't socialize as much
- Sudden change in standard of living
- Seems fearful
- Unexplained injuries



## TYPES OF ABUSE

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Financial
- Neglect
- Violation of Rights

## PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any act of violence or rough handling that may or may not result in physical injury but causes physical discomfort or pain.

Adapted from : Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002

### PHYSICAL ABUSE CAN BE:

- Pushing, shoving
- Hitting, slapping, poking
- Pulling hair, biting, pinching
- Confining or restraining a person
- Unusual patterns of injuries
- Unexplained injuries such as broken bones, bruises, bumps, cuts, burns, welts, grip marks

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Any sexual behaviour directed toward an older adult without that person's full knowledge and consent.

Adapted from: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002

### SEXUAL ABUSE CAN BE:

- Unwanted touching
- Making sexual remarks or suggestions to another person
- Forcing a person to touch another person in the genital area
- Forcing a person to perform a sexual act
- Forced intercourse

## EMOTIONAL / PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Any action, verbal or non-verbal, that lessens a person's sense of identity, dignity and self-worth.

Adapted from: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002

### EMOTIONAL ABUSE CAN BE:

- Words or actions which put a person down, are hurtful, make a person feel unworthy
- Not considering a person's wishes
- Not respecting a person's belongings or pets
- Denying access to grandchildren or friends
- Threatening – e.g., telling an older person that you will put them in a “home”
- Treating an older person like a child

## FINANCIAL ABUSE

Any improper conduct, done with or without the informed consent of the older adult, that results in a monetary or personal gain to the abuser and/or monetary or personal loss for the older adult.

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence; C. Spencer; NCFV, June 1994

### FINANCIAL ABUSE CAN BE:

- The misuse of an older person's property and/or funds
- Theft, forgery or fraud
- Improper use of a Power of Attorney for Property

Adapted from: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002

## NEGLECT

Not meeting the basic needs of an older person.

- Active Neglect: deliberate withholding of care or the basic necessities of life
- Passive Neglect: failure to provide proper care due to lack of knowledge, experience or ability

Adapted from: Health Canada Mental Health Division, 1994

### NEGLECT CAN BE:

- Withholding care or medical attention
- Leaving a person in an unsafe place
- Over or under medicating
- Not providing food or liquids
- Not providing proper clothing or hygiene
- Untreated bedsores
- Abandonment

## **VIOLATION OF RIGHTS**

Denial of a person's rights as set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and Provincial Legislation.

Adapted from: Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2002

### **VIOLATION OF RIGHTS CAN BE:**

- Denying a person privacy/intimacy
- Withholding information
- Denying a person visitors
- Restricting a person's liberty, not letting them go out and/or socialize
- Censoring a person's mail

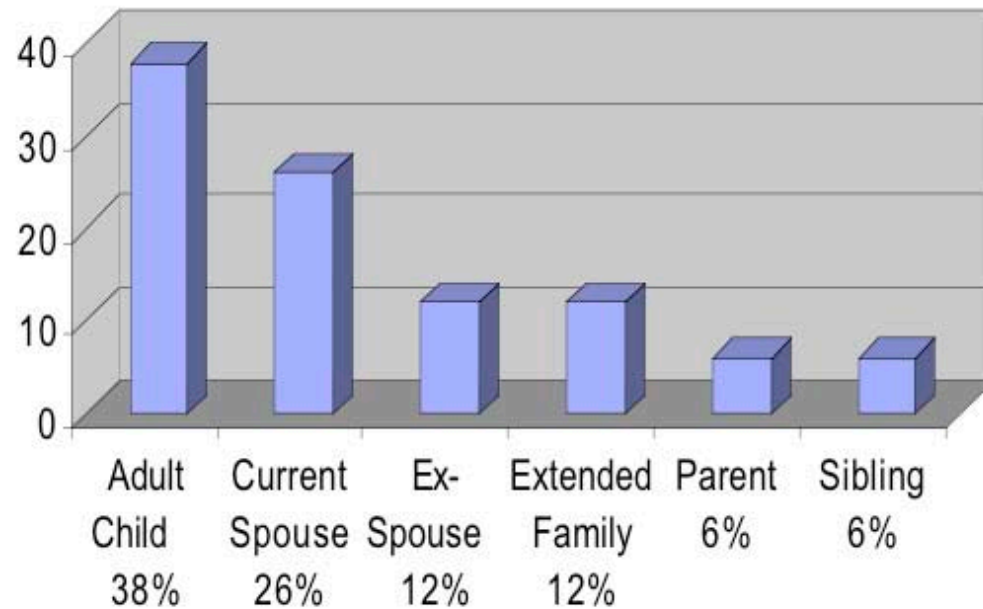
## ABUSE CONTINUUMS

- Abuse, if not addressed, can escalate with increasing seriousness of harm
- All forms of abuse can go from “minor” incidents through to abuses where medical treatment would be necessary and/or to death
- Abused older adults are vulnerable to complications resulting from abuse – these could affect their ability to function independently



<b>CRIMINAL ABUSE</b>	<b>NON-CRIMINAL ABUSE</b>
Assault	Mental Cruelty
Sexual Assault	Isolation
Failure to Provide Necessities	Frightening
Threats / Intimidation	Ignoring
Murder / Manslaughter	Neglect (passive)
Forcible Confinement	Humiliation
Theft / Fraud / Forgery / Extortion	Insulting / Infantilizing

## Percentages of Abusers Related to the Abused in a Subset of Abuses Reported to the Police; 2002



## **RISK FACTORS FOR ABUSE**

- History of abuse in family/domestic violence
- Increased vulnerability, e.g., physical frailty
- Diminished capacity to make decisions
- Isolation

## **ABUSERS MAY HAVE...**

- Substance abuse problems
- A history of mental illness or emotional problems
- Dependency on the older person for assistance
- Resentment of caregiving role
- Depression
- Anger management issues
- Chronic fatigue
- Stress beyond ability to cope
- Tendency to control or bully
- Family / marital problems
- No visible dysfunctional traits

Cooney & Mortimer, 1995

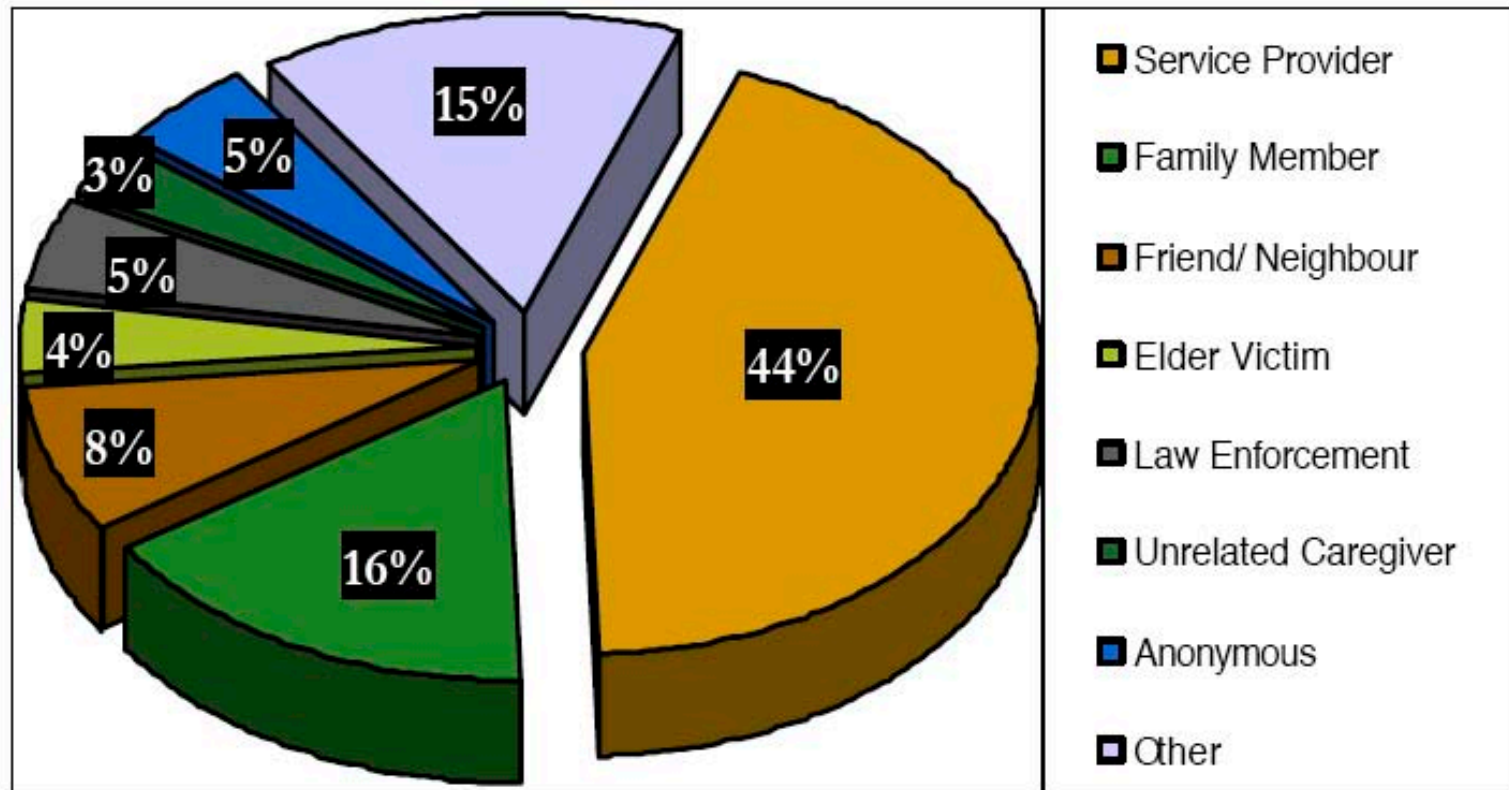
## ABUSED OLDER ADULTS MAY BE...

- Female
- Over the age of 75
- Widowed or living alone
- Socially isolated
- Under the control or influence of the abuser
- Experiencing some degree of physical impairment or mental incapacity
- Physically frail, but mentally capable



Mental Health Division, Health Canada, 1994

## WHO REPORTS ABUSE



National Aging Resource Centre on Elder Abuse, 1995

## WHY IS ABUSE KEPT SECRET?

Abused older adults:

- Fear more abuse
- Feel humiliated or ashamed
- Blame themselves for the abuse
- Fear a loss of affection
- Worry about what will happen to them and/or to the abuser
- Believe that family honour is at stake

Others don't speak up because they:

- Don't know that something can be done
- Don't know who to speak to about what they suspect
- Don't want to get involved

## HOW TO RESPOND IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

If you see actual abuse, or someone tells you that they are being abused, listen carefully and reassure them that:

- It is not their fault
- They are not alone
- There is help available
- Label abusive behaviours and/or actions as abuse
- Provide resources
- Support the right of the older adult to make their own decisions
- Respect their privacy/confidentiality

## **If you are faced with an emergency or there is threat of imminent harm Call 911.**

Otherwise, the following are some referrals you might give to the older adult:

- Your local Community Care Access Centre
- Your local Police service
- Local support services

## **WHAT IF HELP IS REFUSED?**

- Remind the older adult that you are willing to provide them with assistance in the future if they wish you to
- Maintain contact with the person
- Provide referrals/resources as appropriate

## Local Resources

**You can obtain more information by contacting:**

- ONPEA
- Regional Consultants –  
Ontario's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse
- Your local Abuse of Older Adults Network/Committee



You Can Make a Difference! You may not be able to fix the problem but you can offer support and information. By being there for our friends and neighbours we will build a safer community for us all.

Central Park Lodges; L. Denomme, RKM, 2004



The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (ONPEA)  
234 Eglinton Ave East, suite 203, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 1K5

Produced by [pdfPictures.com](http://pdfPictures.com)