



Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Child
Family
Community
Australia

Responding to elder abuse:

Rights, safety and participation

Adam Dean and Megan Frost

CFCA webinar

28 August 2019

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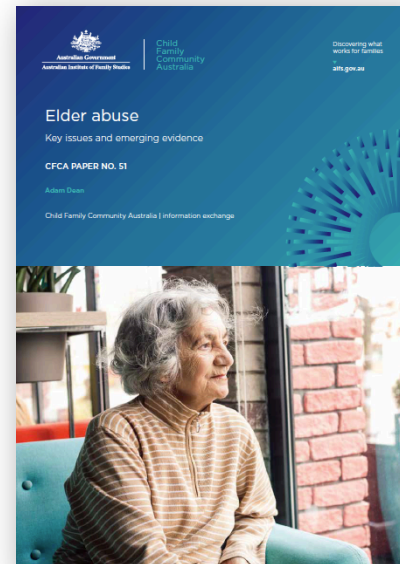


House keeping

- Send through your questions via the chat box at any time during the webinar.
- Let us know if you **don't** want your question published on the online forum following the presentation.
- All our webinars are recorded.
- The slides are available in the handout section of Gotowebinar.
- The audio and transcript will be posted on our website and YouTube channel in the coming week.

Overview

- *CFCA paper, Elder abuse: Key issues and emerging evidence*
 - Key issues involved in how elder abuse is defined
 - Prevalence, impact and associated risk factors
 - Implications for policy and practice



Older people in Australia

- 'Older people' are generally defined as:
 - 60 to 65 years and older (non-Indigenous Australians)
 - 45 to 50 years and older (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples).

Diversity, ability and living arrangements



- Diverse population, representing different cultural backgrounds, lifestyles and abilities
 - Older people are more likely to have a disability
 - Risk of dementia increases with age
 - Most live in private households
 - Need for care/assistance with daily living increases with age
- Disability, dementia and need for assistance may increase risk of elder abuse, but other factors exacerbate it

What is elder abuse? General definition

- Contemporary definitions are more inclusive, but no universal consensus.
- A widely accepted definition defines elder abuse as:

‘a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person’. (WHO, 2008, p. 1)
- Older people may also be potential perpetrators of abuse (e.g. spouses/partners, friends or peers in institutional care settings).

What is elder abuse? Different types

- Five types of abuse are generally recognised:
 - physical abuse
 - psychological or emotional abuse
 - sexual abuse
 - financial abuse
 - neglect.
- Types of abuse may co-occur and vary in severity and frequency.

Prevalence of elder abuse: International findings

- International prevalence data indicates:
 - 15.7% of adults aged 60 years and older living in community settings experience elder abuse every year.
 - Sexual abuse (0.9%)
 - Physical abuse (2.6%)
 - Neglect (4.2%)
 - Financial abuse (6.8%)
 - Psychological abuse (11.6%)
 - Higher rates of abuse occur in institutional care settings and for people with disabilities.

Prevalence of elder abuse: Australian estimates



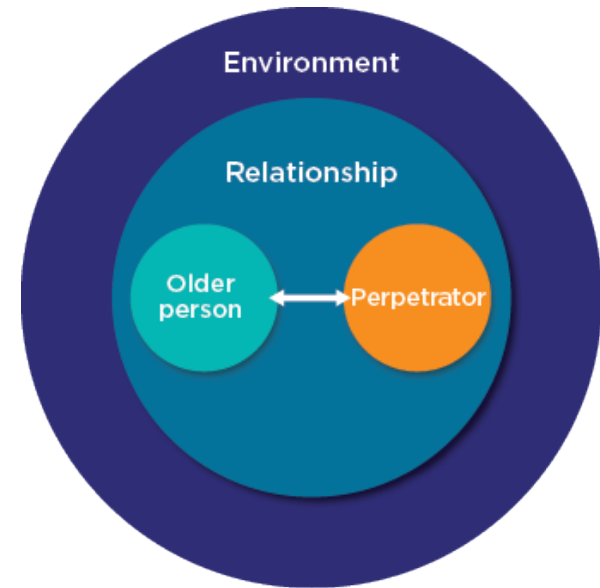
- **No national prevalence data** for elder abuse in Australia.
- Based on international data, it has been estimated that 2–14% of older people in Australia may experience elder abuse every year (Kaspiew, Carson, & Rhoades, 2016).
- Incidence data from elder abuse helplines tends to indicate that:
 - financial and psychological abuse are most frequently reported
 - sons or daughters are most frequently reported perpetrators.

Impacts of elder abuse

- Common effect of reducing an older person's quality of life
- Specific impacts may include:
 - psychological distress, emotional difficulties
 - disrupted relationships, restrictions on autonomy
 - compromised health, physical injury
 - loss of assets and finances.
- Long-term effects may include higher rates of depression, PTSD, anxiety and poor health compared to non-victims.

Risk factors for elder abuse

- A range of factors are associated with increased risk of elder abuse.
- These include factors relating to:
 - older people
 - perpetrators
 - relationship characteristics
 - broader community and societal context (environment).



Risk factors: Older people

- Cognitive impairment and disability
- Poor mental health
- Social isolation
- History of abuse, family violence or conflict
- Other factors

Risk factors: Perpetrators

- Caregiver stress
- Financial or emotional dependency on an older adult
- Poor mental health
- Alcohol and other drugs
- Attitudes of entitlement

Risk factors: Relationships

- **Relationship types**
 - Family relationships
 - Adult children
 - Spouses/partners
- **Relationship characteristics**
 - History of family conflict
 - Poor quality relationships
 - Dependence and interdependence

Risk factors: Community and societal contexts



- **Community-level factors**
 - Social isolation and exclusion
- **Institutional care setting factors**
 - Opportunities for peer-to-peer abuse
 - Lack of resources, unregulated restrictive practices, carer stress, lack of appropriate carer skills (all risks for abuse where present)
- **Societal factors**
 - Ageism
 - Inadequate health and social support services
 - Economic pressures
 - Intergenerational conflict

Prevention and intervention

- Public health approach to prevention and intervention:
 - ***Primary (or universal) interventions*** target whole communities or populations to prevent elder abuse
 - ***Secondary interventions*** target particular at-risk populations
 - ***Tertiary interventions*** respond to victims and/or perpetrators of elder abuse

Prevention and intervention: Guiding principles



- In its final inquiry report, the Australian Law Reform Commission made recommendations that aimed to balance two guiding principles:
 - **dignity and autonomy**
 - **protection and safeguarding.**
- Policy and practice responses are challenged to balance these principles.

Primary interventions

- Prevention strategies operating at national or state/territory levels may include:
 - legislation relevant to preventing or remediating forms of elder abuse
 - policy and practice frameworks
 - education and awareness strategies
 - sector-wide workforce development and support for relevant professionals.
- *The National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023* is part of a national strategy to address elder abuse.

Secondary interventions

- Screening and risk assessment strategies aim to screen/assess risk and determine appropriate action.
- Social support and capacity building strategies:
 - Caregiver/family support services
 - Financial management
 - Legal assistance
 - Helplines
- Social support is a key protective factor

Tertiary interventions

- Tertiary interventions face two main challenges:
 - complexity of elder abuse occurring in multiple forms
 - lack of strong evidence base.
- Tertiary interventions can target:
 - older people/victims
 - carers/perpetrators
 - families.

Tertiary interventions: Targeting older people/victims

- Multidisciplinary and coordinated intervention approaches:
 - Social workers
 - Legal professionals
 - Health and mental health professionals
- Case management and advocacy
- Elder abuse helplines
- Emergency shelters

Tertiary interventions: Targeting carers/perpetrators

- Less common than interventions targeting older people/victims.
- Interventions include:
 - psycho-educative support groups
 - anger management
 - Counselling.

Tertiary interventions: Targeting families

- New and emerging area of practice
- Interventions include:
 - family mediation
 - family care conferences
 - family-focused psychological/counselling approaches.
- Healthy relationships with family members is a key protective factor.

Conclusion

- Elder abuse is a complex phenomenon involving a range of abusive behaviours/experiences.
- Practitioners, policy makers and researchers are encouraged to consider various prevention and intervention strategies – in particular, to think about working with others to develop coordinated approaches.

References

- *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)*
- Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC). (2017). *Elder abuse - a national legal response: Final report*. Sydney: ALRC.
- Council of Attorneys-General. (2019). *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*. Canberra: Attorney-General's Department. Retrieved from www.ag.gov.au/elderabuse
- Kaspiw, R., Carson, R., & Rhoades, H. (2016). *Elder abuse: Understanding issues, frameworks and responses*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Retrieved from aifs.gov.au/publications/elder-abuse
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2008). *A global response to elder abuse and neglect: Building primary health care capacity to deal with the problem worldwide*. Geneva: WHO.

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Megan Frost



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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future for they carry the cultural wisdom, stories, traditions and dreaming.

Relationships Australia.
NEW SOUTH WALES

Let's Talk Video

Let's Talk – Elder Mediation and Support Service

- Funded by NSW Government Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund (for 3 years)
- Builds on Relationships Australia NSW's counselling and mediation services
- Aims to mitigate the risk of, and respond early to Elder Abuse

Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service – who is it for?

- ***Let's Talk* works with older people, their families and support networks struggling with ageing and age-related issues, including:**
 - intergenerational relationships challenges
 - safety and wellbeing
 - planning for the future
 - housing and living arrangements.
- ***Let's Talk* assists older people, their families and support networks to:**
 - have important, sometimes difficult, conversations
 - manage conflict
 - make decisions that protect the interests and rights of the older person and their family
 - know what other services are available.

Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service – what clients can expect

- Referral to *Let's Talk* made by older person, family member, other service
- Initial Consultation by phone with a Family Advisor
- First appointment (pre-mediation or counselling) usually face-to-face
- Mediation and / or counselling
 - Confidential
 - Voluntary

[RANSW - Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service](#)

[Relationships Australia - Senior Relationship Services](#)

Let's Talk – the background and beginnings

- **Relationships Australia National Trial - Elder Relationships Services Pilot**
 - [Assisting Families with Ageing Related Issues - Paula Mance](#)
- **International work in Elder Mediation**
 - [Exploring the Role of Elder Mediation in the Prevention of Elder Abuse Final Report. Department of Justice Canada- Judith McCann-Beranger \(2012\)](#)
- **NSW Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit, now the NSW Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline**
 - <https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/>
- **Staff training**
 - Elder Mediation - Associate Professor Dale Bagshaw, PhD, Adjunct, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia.
 - [EMIN Code of Ethics for Elder Mediators 9th edn](#)
 - Elder Abuse

Let's Talk – ensuring the voices of older people are heard

- **Ageism**
 - [EveryAge Counts](#)
- **Commitment to hear directly from the older person**
- **Challenge**
 - Are there times when we would not speak directly with the older person?
 - How to ensure that the voice and wishes of the older person are represented?

Let's Talk – ensuring the rights of older people are known and upheld

- **Human Rights**
- **Understand legal documents (ask for help if you don't)**
 - Who are decision makers?
 - When and what decisions can be made?
 - How to change?
- **Have resources available to help people know about legal rights and options**
 - [NSW Legal Aid Fact Sheets and Resources](#)
 - An example [NSW Legal Aid - Adult children living at home, how to get them to leave](#)
 - [The NSW Trustee and Guardian](#)

Let's Talk – safety

- Relationships Australia NSW is committed to positively and appropriately addressing issues of safety, including family and domestic violence, elder abuse and the abuse and neglect of children and young people.
- **Let's Talk** follows RANSW client safety procedures which include:
 - screening
 - ongoing assessment of risk and suitability of service
 - safety planning
 - referral.
- **Challenge: people are entitled to make bad decisions**
- [NSW Elder Abuse Toolkit](#)

Let's Talk – working with other services

- **Working with other services**
 - NSW Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline
 - Seniors Rights Service
 - Dementia Australia
 - GP's
 - Carers NSW
 - NSW Police
 - Financial advice
 - Many others!

Let's Talk – practitioner reflection

- **Planning for each family**
- **Time**
- **Ageism**
- **Close to home**

Let's Talk – clients say...

- “I really feel hopeful that things might improve. I’m so glad I contacted you.”
- “I thought there was nothing I could do. You feel so helpless. It’s great to know that there are options and people who can help.”
- “I feel I am moving forward and have a plan. I feel more confident to contact (my son) and try to work things out, now I have some support.”
- “Thank you for keeping us safe and on track.”

Resources

- [Assisting Families with Ageing Related Issues - Paula Mance, Relationships Australia](#)
- [Exploring the Role of Elder Mediation in the Prevention of Elder Abuse Final Report. Department of Justice Canada- Judith McCann-Beranger \(2012\)](#)
- [NSW Ageing and Disability Commission](#)
- [NSW Elder Abuse Toolkit](#)
- [NSW Legal Aid Fact Sheets and Resources](#)
- [NSW Trustee and Guardian](#)
- [RANSW - Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service](#)
- [Relationships Australia - Senior Relationship Services](#)
- [EveryAge Counts](#)
- [Elder Mediation International Network \(EMIN\)](#)
- [Elder Mediation Australasian Network \(EMAN\)](#)



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