



Elder abuse in Australia: Physical abuse

Findings from the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study

Research snapshot | August 2022



This snapshot discusses elder abuse and presents material that some people may find distressing. If you or someone you know needs assistance, please call **1800 ELDERHelp** (1800 353 374). A list of elder abuse support services is available [at the end of this snapshot](#). If you are in immediate danger call Police on 000.

About the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (NEAPS)

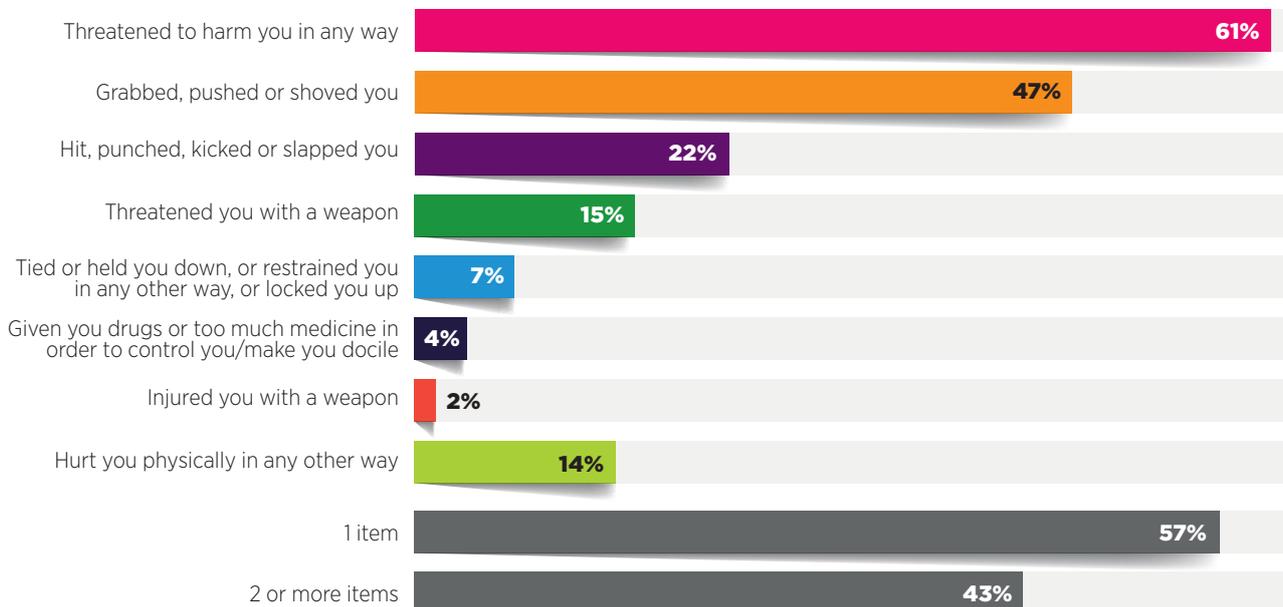
As part of the [National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians](#) (Council of Attorneys-General, 2019), the Attorney-General's Department commissioned the **National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (NEAPS)** to investigate elder abuse. This snapshot provides the key findings of the Survey of Older People (2020), a nationally representative survey of 7,000 people aged 65 and over living in the community (i.e. they did not live in residential aged care settings). The full report on the NEAPS is available on the [AIFS website](#).

How common is physical abuse?

The Survey of Older People indicated that **2%** of community-dwelling people aged 65 and older in Australia reported experiencing physical abuse in the 12 months preceding the survey.

The most common form of physical abuse reported was threats to harm (61%), followed by reports of being grabbed, pushed or shoved (47%) (Figure 1). Most older people who experienced physical abuse reported experiencing one type of physical abuse (57%), with 43% reporting multiple types.

Figure 1: Participants who experienced physical abuse in the past 12 months, proportion reporting each physical abuse item and number of items reported



Men were slightly more likely than women to report physical abuse but these differences were limited. The experience of physical abuse was associated with poorer physical health, poorer psychological health and a lower sense of social connection.

Who commits physical abuse?

Older people who reported an experience of physical abuse in the past 12 months provided information regarding the main perpetrators of this abuse. The 'main perpetrator' of physical abuse referred to the person who was the only perpetrator of the physical abuse or to the perpetrator who affected the older person the most if there was more than one perpetrator.

- Most 'main perpetrators' of physical abuse were males (over three-quarters) and not employed (three-quarters).
- Mental health problems were common among 'main perpetrators' of physical abuse (63%).

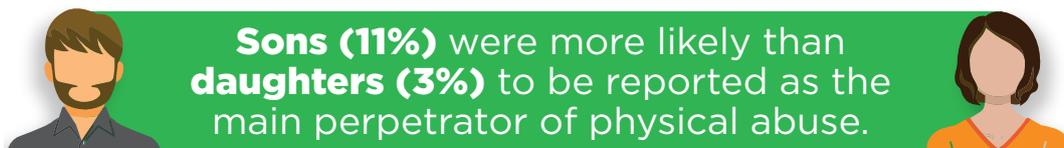
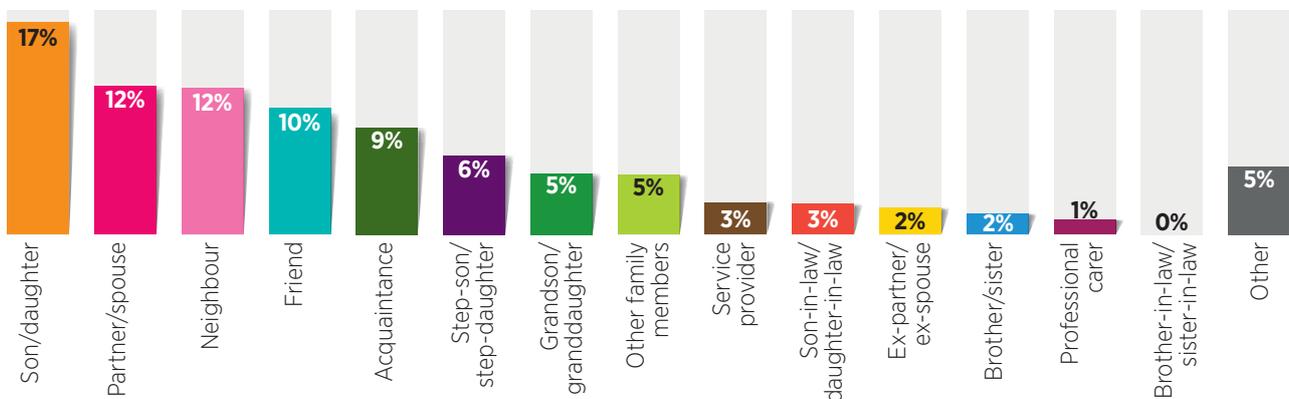


Figure 2 shows the relationship between the person who perpetrated the physical abuse and the older person who experienced the abuse. The figure refers to all physical abuse perpetrators (i.e. 'main perpetrators' and other perpetrators).

- Overall, more than one-quarter of perpetrators had intergenerational relationships with the victim.
 - Children were the largest perpetrator group for physical abuse (17%).
 - Step-children accounted for 6% of all physical abuse perpetrators and grandchildren accounted for 5%.
- Intimate partners were another large group perpetrating physical abuse (12%).

Figure 2: Relationship of perpetrators to the participants who experienced physical abuse (as % of all physical abuse perpetrators)



Note: An older person may report more than one person as a perpetrator of physical abuse.

Do people who experience physical abuse seek help?

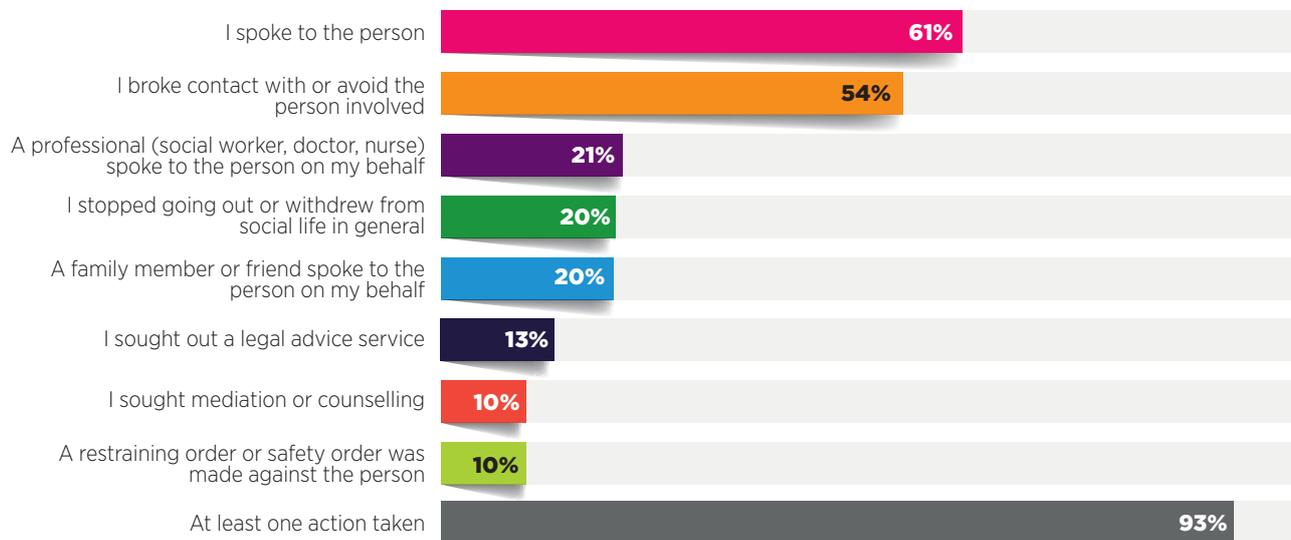
One-half of older people who reported experiencing physical abuse in the past 12 months indicated that they sought help or advice for their physical abuse.

Of the older people who sought help or advice about their experience of physical abuse, the following were common sources of support:



Regardless of whether they reported seeking help or advice from a third party, the vast majority of older people who reported an experience of physical abuse (93%) said that they took action, or had action taken on their behalf, to stop the physical abuse from happening again.

Figure 3: Action taken by participants who experienced physical abuse in the past 12 months



Note: Multiple responses and sum may exceed 100%.

Support services/Helplines

- If you have any concerns about potential or actual elder abuse, please contact **1800 ELDERHelp** (1800 353 374) to be redirected to the existing phone line service in your state or territory (free call).
- If you or someone you know have experienced violence or sexual assault and require immediate or ongoing assistance, contact **1800 RESPECT** (1800 737 732) to talk to a counsellor from the National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline.
- For confidential support and information, contact Safe Steps' 24/7 family violence response line on **1800 015 188** or the Men's Referral Service on **1300 766 491**.
- For a confidential discussion with an experienced counsellor, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

Citation

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