

## The Abuse of Older Adults

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According to the World Health Organization (2002), abuse of seniors is "a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm to an older person".



Statistics Canada shows that in 2015 the police-reported rate of family violence for senior women was 66 per 100,000, and 52 per 100,000 for senior men. One-third of these older persons were victimized by a grown child, spouse, sibling, or extended family member.



### Rights of older adults

Older adults, as a group, are very heterogenous - they have a wide variety of life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and other circumstances that make each situation unique. For this reason, intervention with older adults cannot be a "one-size fits all" approach.

As with younger adults, older adults have the right to self-determination and independence. They have the right to participate in making decisions about themselves, to the full extent that they are able to do so.

Older adults can experience the same types of abuse that are prevalent in domestic violence situations (such as dynamics of power and control, emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse). It can also include other types of violence and abuse, such as neglect, financial abuse, and the abuse of medications.

Many factors make the abuse of older adults especially complex. Those perpetrating the violence may be intimate partners but can also be children, other relatives, friends, or caregivers. Whether or not the abuse is committed by a family member, the abuser is often in a position of power or trust over the older adult. The older adult may be financially dependent on the abusive person, or dependent on the abusive person for care or other forms of support. Conversely, the abusive person may financially depend on the older adult.

## What you can do to help

- **Before taking action, ask yourself if your actions will empower the older adult; adults have the right to make their own decisions.**
- **Allow time for the older adult to tell their story; listen and be respectful.**
- **Understand that the older adult may not want to cease contact with the abuser, especially if that person is a family member.**
- **Provide information about abuse, legal options, and referrals to agencies that provide safe accommodation and counselling support.**
- **Help the older adult to decide what action they would like to take.**



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