

Elder Abuse in Canada

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Statistics

Each year, about ten percent of Canadian Older Adults (65 years or older) are victims of crime.

Up to one percent of Canadian seniors experience violent crimes or physical abuse.

Almost five percent of older adults report experiencing some form of abuse from the age of 65 on.

Forms of Abuse

Physical abuse

Physical abuse includes hitting or handling an older adult roughly, even if there is no injury. Providing too much or too little medication or physically restraining a person against their will are also forms of physical abuse.

Emotional abuse

It is emotional abuse or psychological abuse if somebody threatens, intimidates, or humiliates an older adult, treats the person like a child, or does not allow them to see their family and friends.

Financial abuse

Financial abuse is when someone deceives or threatens older adults to take their money, property, or belongings, including forging checks, stealing retirement benefits, using credit cards or bank accounts without permission, and making unauthorized changes to wills or property titles.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs if someone coerces an older adult into engaging in sexual activity, which may include verbal or suggestive behavior, not respecting personal privacy, sexual touching, or sex without the person's consent.

Violation of rights and freedoms

Interfering with an older adult's ability to make choices, especially those protected under the law, violates their rights and freedoms. Examples include:

- Interfering with spiritual practices.
- Withholding information.
- Denying privacy.
- Preventing visitors.
- Dictating how someone can spend their own money.
- Keeping someone in an institution without a legitimate reason.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when someone fails to provide the necessities of life, such as:

- food and clothing
- safe shelter
- medical attention and personal care
- necessary supervision.

Neglect may be intentional or unintentional.

Systemic abuse

Systemic or institutional abuse refers to rules, regulations, policies, or practices that harm or discriminate against older adults. This includes rules that hurt the person and were developed for an apparently neutral purpose. An Example is diapering a person instead of helping them to the washroom to save time or effort.

Signs of Elder Abuse

An older person might be a victim of abuse if they:

- seem depressed, confused, or withdrawn
- are isolated from friends and family
- have unexplained bruises, burns, cuts, or scars
- develop preventable conditions such as bedsores
- have hazardous, unsafe, or unclean living conditions
- appear dirty, underfed, dehydrated, under or over-medicated.
- lack personal health care items such as glasses, a walker, dentures, or hearing aid
- have recent changes in banking or spending patterns

What you can do when you suspect abuse of an older adult:

1. Talk to the older adult. Find a time to speak in private, ask open-ended questions, listen to their experiences, and ask what they want.
2. Get consent before sharing an older adult's personal information. Respect their choices, but call the police or 911 if the situation is dangerous.
3. Do not directly confront or accuse the abusive person, as it may result in harm to the older adult.
4. Check with a professional if you're unsure what to do or need support.

How to report Elder Abuse

See the related links to the Provincial Resource pages below.

Sources:

Spotting the Signs of Elder Abuse - National Institute on Aging

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/elder-abuse/spotting-signs-elder-abuse>

Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

<https://cnpea.ca/>

Crime and Abuse Against Seniors

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/crim/sum-som.html>

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