

Background

Recognising elder abuse

15 January 2019

Introduction

Following the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, elder abuse has been recognised as a form of family violence. The Victorian Government has funded a range of initiatives to support the capacity of health and community services to recognise and respond to elder abuse.

1. Definition of elder abuse

Australia has adopted the World Health Organisation’s definition of 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’.

In the health and human services sectors in Victoria, the term ‘elder abuse’ does not usually apply to situations where there is a professional relationship with an older person. Professional misconduct in relation to an older person is addressed by other legislation and regulation.

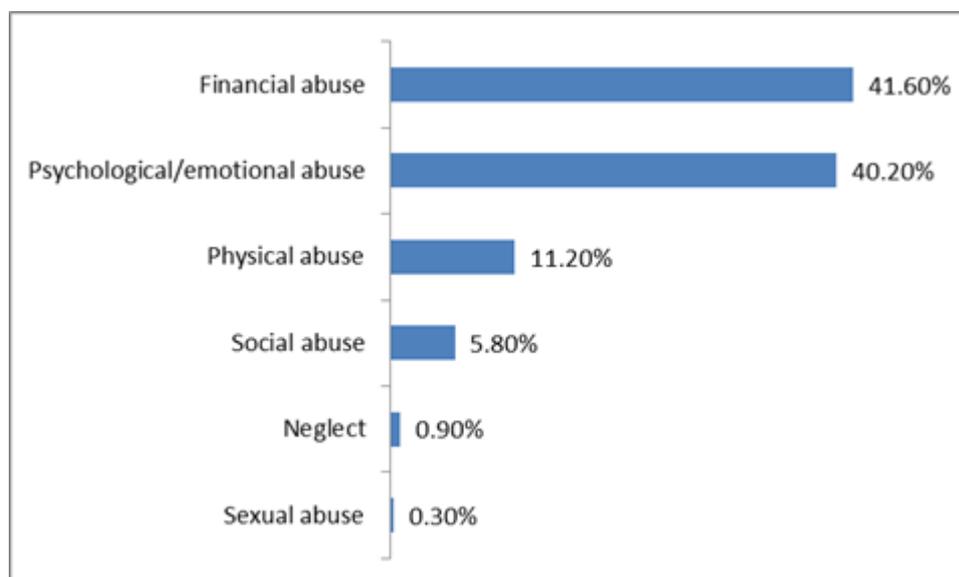
2. Types of elder abuse

| Type of elder abuse | Description | Warning signs |
|---|---|--|
| Financial abuse | Taking an older person’s money or property, misuse of power of attorney such as using an older person’s funds for own expenses, denying an older person access to their funds, or forcing an older person to change legal documents. Sometimes can be more subtle, such as family moving into the older person’s home and not contributing to expenses. | An older person being worried about legal matters or being asked to sign documents, requests to the health service by family members for documentation, older person’s belongings going missing, unexplained withdrawals from the older person’s bank accounts, the older person being unable to pay bills or going without food or medication, older person’s house being taken over by others. |
| Psychological (or emotional) abuse | Intimidating, pressuring, threatening, humiliating, bullying or repeatedly criticising the older person. | Older person appears depressed, tearful or angry. May talk about feeling helpless or useless. |
| Neglect | Failing to provide food and a safe, secure home, ignoring the needs of the older person for adequate clothing and healthcare, leaving the older person unattended for long periods of time. Neglect is considered elder abuse | Older person being malnourished, living in unhygienic or uncomfortable conditions, necessities such as food and medical care not being provided. |

| Type of elder abuse | Description | Warning signs |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Social abuse | Older person may be restricted from contacting friends or certain family members, making phone calls, or participating in social or cultural events. | Older person appears withdrawn, expressing feelings of loneliness, or appears to be restricted from communicating freely. |
| Sexual abuse | Sexual harassment or sexual assault, indecent exposure, inappropriate touching, sexually explicit language. | Physical injuries, unexplained sexually transmitted diseases, and psychological symptoms including anxiety and sleep disturbance. |

Financial abuse and psychological/emotional abuse are the most commonly reported types of elder abuse.

Types of abuse reported to Seniors Rights Victoria July 2012 – June 2014



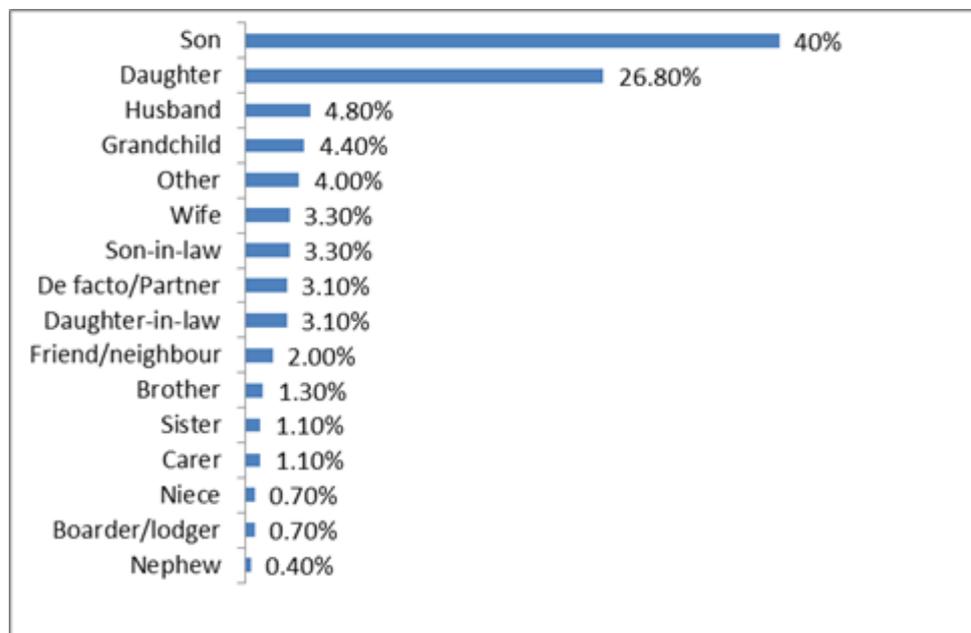
Source: *Profile of elder abuse in Victoria: Analysis of data about people seeking help from Seniors Rights Victoria Summary Report*, June 2015, National Ageing Research Institute in partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria.

3. Alleged perpetrators of elder abuse

Two thirds of reported elder abuse cases involve sons or daughters.

More than 90% of reported elder abuse cases involve a person related to the older person, or in a de facto relationship.

Alleged perpetrators of elder abuse reported to Seniors Rights Victoria July 2012 – June 2014



Source: *Profile of elder abuse in Victoria: Analysis of data about people seeking help from Seniors Rights Victoria Summary Report*, June 2015, National Ageing Research Institute in partnership with Seniors Rights Victoria.

4. PSRACS obligations in relation to responding to elder abuse

- *Aged Care Act 1997* (mandatory reporting of physical assault, unreasonable force, and unlawful sexual conduct).
- National Aged Care Quality Standard 8: Organisational governance - effective risk management systems and practices, including identifying and responding to abuse or neglect.
- Duty of Care where there is foreseeable risk of harm to a resident/program participant.