

## ***Elder Abuse ... what is it and what can be done about it?***

*Elder Abuse is any act (or failure to act where a duty of care exists) occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect.*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes elder abuse as follows:

*Elder abuse is a violation of human rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, lost productivity, isolation and despair.*

Elder Abuse is real. About 5% of people over the age of 60 have experienced abuse by people that they trusted. Most perpetrators are their adult children – their sons and daughters. In many ways elder abuse is one kind of domestic violence which, until now, has not been given the attention that is warranted.

Overcoming elder abuse means first recognising it for what it is. Elder Abuse is a relatively recent term for a form of mistreatment that, in reality, is just one part of a spectrum of violence that occurs when differences in power exist in relationships between people. Simply put, where there is an imbalance of power in a relationship there is a risk of abuse occurring from the dominant person or persons. Failure to recognise that Elder Abuse is occurring is a problem for older victims as well as well-intentioned carers, family and close friends. For example many older people do not realise that what they are experiencing is abuse. They may pass off their poor treatment by loved ones as just part of their normal existence.

Most older people, who recognise that they are being abused – they may be in very real physical or emotional pain, just want the abuse to stop. They often do not want to take punitive action against their children or loved ones. They often do not have the stamina or health to endure a long and tortuous trial either civil or criminal to get back what is rightfully theirs. Abusers will rely on this to continue their abusive activities even when they know their actions are wrong and causing harm.

Overcoming elder abuse means putting in place systems that make it harder for perpetrators to abuse and or financially exploit their aged relatives.

Overcoming abuse means putting in place preventative measures that reduce the risk of abuse and financial exploitation occurring in the first place.

Overcoming abuse means educating our communities in their responsibilities and inculcating respect for the older members of our society and reducing the tendency towards and incidence of ageism.

Overcoming abuse means empowering older people by educating them about their rights and creating societies where respect for each other is paramount.

Overcoming abuse means streamlining justice systems to reduce barriers and delays for older people to be fairly treated and restitution made for wrongs perpetrated against them. Older people often do not have the time nor the emotional, physical or mental capacity to undertake lengthy and expensive Court processes to redress their problems.

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