

FAQs about Elder Abuse

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust, such as family or friends. It includes financial, emotional, physical, social or sexual abuse and neglect.

It may involve taking someone's money or possessions, not providing necessary care, making threats or stopping an older person's social contacts, as well as physical or sexual abuse.

Who is at risk of elder abuse?

Elder abuse can happen to any older person, regardless of their background or lifestyle.

How many people experience elder abuse?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), [prevalence rates](#) are likely to be underestimated in part because older people are often afraid to report cases of abuse to family, friends or authorities. WHO quotes a 2017 study basedⁱ on the best available evidence from 52 studies in 28 countries from diverse regions, including 12 low and middle income countries, estimating that, over the past year, 15.7% of people aged 60 years and older (one in six) were subjected to some form of abuse. Although the true extent of elder mistreatment is unknown, its social and moral significance is obvious. As our population ages, more and more of us will be affected. Approximately 70 per cent of elder abuse victims are women.ⁱⁱ

How many older people in Victoria could this effect?

Currently in Victoria, 1.25 million people are aged over 60, accounting for more than 20 per cent of the population. By 2031, our older population is set to increase, comprising 22 per cent of the population in Greater Melbourne and 31 per cent in regional and rural Victoria. People aged 65+ contributed 60 per cent of population growth in areas outside capital cities between 2010 and 2015. Older people are highly diverse: 41 per cent of Victorians aged over 65 and 46 per cent of those aged over 85 were born overseas. This diverse and ageing population presents both opportunities and challengesⁱⁱⁱ.

If you, your client or someone you know is experiencing elder abuse contact our free confidential Helpline on 1300 368 821

How does an older person's cultural background affect elder abuse?

Elder abuse occurs in all cultures and backgrounds. There is no evidence that elder abuse is greater in different cultural groups. Today, around 41 per cent of Victorians over 65 years are from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. By 2026, it is projected that one in every four people over 80 years will come from CALD backgrounds.

Experiences of elder abuse vary for people from different cultures. An understanding of cultural aspects is important when someone has been abused.

Why does elder abuse occur?

Ageism in our society can negatively impact on the way we respect older people. Adult children may have a sense of entitlement or, as with many families; there can be mental health problems, alcohol and other drug or gambling problems.

Around 34 per cent of Australians aged 55-64 years and 43 per cent of Australians aged over 65 years have experienced aged discrimination.^{iv}

What is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day?

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is on June 15th each year. It is the internationally recognised day to focus public attention on the significance of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue.

i Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis.

Yon Y, Mikton CR, Gassoumis ZD, Wilber KH. *Lancet Glob Health*. 2017 Feb;5 (2):e147-e156.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28104184>

ii Based on data collected by helplines in Australia. A national prevalence study will provide more accurate information.

iii Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, cat.no. 3101, Table 52, Estimated Resident Population by Single year of Age, Victoria

iv Australian Human Rights Commission (2013)