

## MODULE 2: UNDERSTANDING ELDER ABUSE

### Module objectives:

1. Define elder abuse.
2. Understand why elder abuse is an important issue.
3. Review the types of elder abuse.

### ***Abuse of older adults: What is it?***

*“Any action, or lack of action, by someone in a relationship of trust that results in harm or distress to an older person.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Why is Elder Abuse an important issue now?

- Older adults are the fastest growing age group in Canada and are the most likely to live in a long term care setting.
- People coming into long term care are older, frailer and have increasingly complex needs

### ***Did you know?***

*There are currently 645,000 seniors aged 85+ in Canada, and that is projected to reach 1.28 million seniors aged 85 + by 2031. That is a 98 % increase in the next 20 years.<sup>2</sup>*



### Why Elder Abuse remains and important issue

- Abuse and neglect of residents are common.
- Frontline staff members in long term care witness elder abuse at some point in their career.
- Although witnessed, abuse is often not reported.

#### **Fast Fact**

*In an article published by the Gerontological Society of America, 36% of respondents to a survey had witnessed physical abuse, 10% admitted to themselves committing one or more physically abusive acts, 81% had observed psychological abuse; and 40% had reported committing at least one act of psychological abuse.<sup>3</sup>*

### Why does Elder Abuse happen?

Risk factors that can contribute to abuse:

- Caregiver Stress or frustration resulting from the workplace, personal life, or both.
- Residents more dependent or have more complex needs, which may result in difficult behavior.
- Residents have difficulty communicating what they need.
- Residents are socially isolated as a result of a medical condition or loss of friends or family.
- Difficult family relationships.
- Negative attitudes about the elderly.

#### **Consider the following:**

- Understanding the risk factors that contribute to elder abuse is vital to prevention and effective intervention
- Elder abuse does not occur because of one factor; it's a multifaceted issue that crosses cultural, religious, and socio-economic boundaries
- The greater the number of risk factors that are present in an environment; the greater the potential for abuse to occur.

**Types of abuse:**

1. **Physical:** Any act of violence or rough behaviour that may or may not result in physical injury but causes physical discomfort or pain.

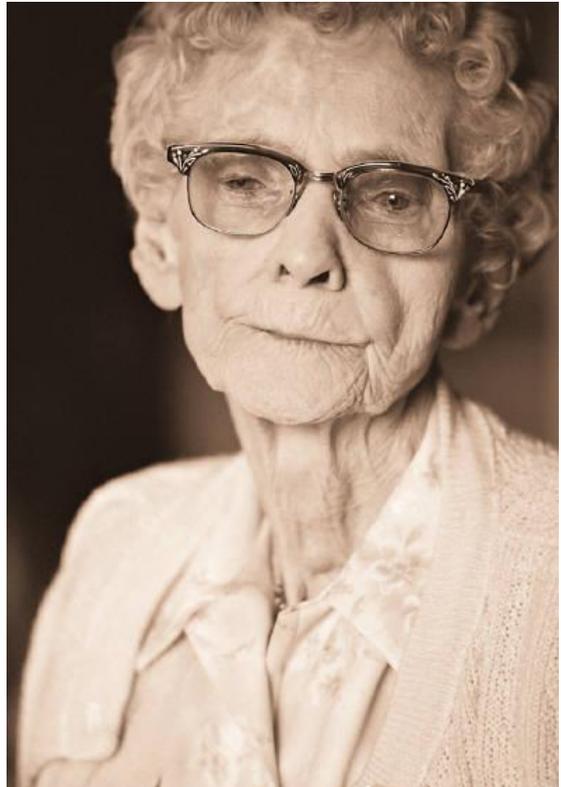
**Can be:**

- Pushing
- Shoving
- Hitting
- Slapping
- Poking
- Medications for restraint
- Pulling hair
- Biting
- Pinching
- Spitting
- Physical restraints

2. **Financial:** Misuse of a resident's money, property or funds, resulting in financial or personal gain for the abuser and/or a financial or personal loss for the resident

**Can be:**

- Taking things
- Leaving bills unpaid
- Lack of spending money
- Undue pressure to buy/sell
- Persuasion to give up control of finances
- Tricked into signing something not understood



3. **Emotional:** Any action, verbal or non-verbal, which lessens a resident's sense of identity, dignity and self-worth.

**Can be:**

- not considering a resident's wishes
- not respecting a resident's belongings
- inappropriate control of activities
- treating a resident like a child
- bullying
- name-calling

4. **Sexual:** Any sexual behavior without the resident's full knowledge and consent.

**Can be:**

- Unwanted touching, kissing, and fondling
- Making sexual remarks and/or suggestions
- Sexual contact without consent
- Lack of personal privacy

***Another Perspective***

*According to the World Health Organization, many seniors report psychological, emotional and verbal abuse as the most harmful forms of abuse. Many older adults reported that physical scars could heal but psychological hurts were emotionally destructive and damaging to their self-worth and sense of self.*

*NOTE: this does not diminish the impact of physical abuse but rather emphasizes the severity of emotional abuse*

**5. Neglect:** Not meeting the basic needs of the resident, either intentionally (active), or unintentionally (passive).

**Can be:**

- Withholding care or medical attention
- Leaving a resident in an unsafe place
- Over or under medicating
- Not providing food or liquids
- Not providing proper clothing or hygiene
- Untreated medical conditions such as bedsores
- Abandonment
- Restraining the resident inappropriately



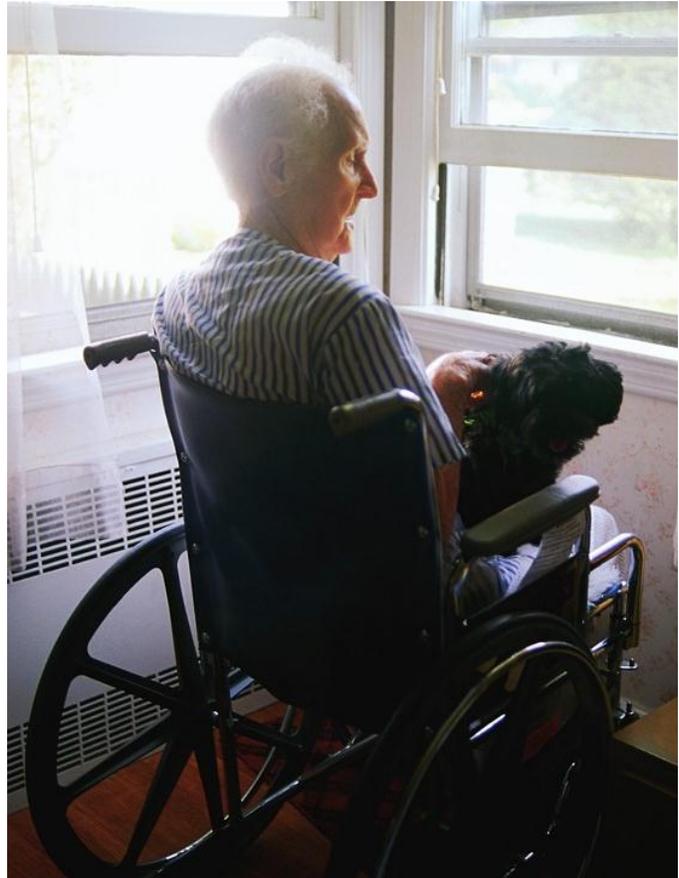
**The difference between active and passive neglect**

- **Active** neglect consists of the deliberate choice to withhold care all the while being aware that the aforementioned lack of actions is not in the best interest of the older person.
- **Passive** neglect is exemplified in individuals who are doing their best to provide care but may not have the knowledge, skills, or resources to provide adequate care, including not knowing how to access local resources. These individuals may be misguided by inaccurate or outdated information.

**6. Violation of rights:** The denial of a resident's rights as an adult, including legal rights

**Can be:**

- Interfering with a resident's mail
- Withholding information
- Not letting the resident go out and/or socialize
- Denying privacy, visitors, phone calls
- Denying of religious worship or spiritual practice



### The Rights of Older Adults

Older adults have the right to:

- Basic requirements of life such as food, clothing, and shelter.
- Live free from physical, sexual, psychological, financial, and medication abuse, violation of civil/human rights, and neglect.
- be informed about their civil and legal rights.
- Self-determination.
- Live as they wish, provided they do not infringe upon the rights and safety of others.
- Participate in making decisions about themselves, to the full extent of their capability.
- Refuse assistance and intervention.<sup>5</sup>

**Module key points:**

1. Elder abuse can occur in any type relationship where an individual exercises a position of power over the older adult.
2. There are many risk factors that contribute to the abuse an elderly person.
3. Abuse can manifest itself in many different forms.

*References:*

- 1- National Senior's Council (2007). *Report of the National Seniors Council on Elder Abuse*. Toronto, Canada: National Senior's Council.
- 2- Statistics Canada (2010). *Projected population by age group according to three projection scenarios for 2010, 2011, 2016, 2021, 2026, 2031 and 2036, at July 1*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo08c-eng.htm>
- 3- Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (2011). *Abuse in institutions*. Retrieved from: [http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse\\_in\\_institutions.htm](http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse_in_institutions.htm)
- 4- Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (June 2011). *Ageism*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnpea.ca/ageism.htm>.
- 5- Etkin, Lafortune, Preston, Taggart. *Basic Introduction to the Abuse of Older Adults*. Toronto, Canada: The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

**Notes:**