



Elder Abuse Prevention in Grey Bruce

Older adults are valuable members of our communities. They contribute to society in many ways as family members, volunteers, caregivers, employees, and more.

Elder abuse is becoming recognized as an increasing concern globally. Elder abuse is “a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship in which there is expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”

There are several types of abuse that can cause harm or distress to older adults, including physical, psychological/emotional, financial, sexual, neglect, and abandonment. Multiple forms of abuse can happen at the same time and can occur in several settings including institutions, homes, communities or via the internet.



Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario suggests that **between 8-10% of older adults experience some form of abuse.**⁽²⁾

26%

of the Grey Bruce population is aged 65 years and older and they make up **the fastest growing segment of the Grey Bruce population.** Between the 2016 and 2021 census, there was a 19% increase in older adults 65 to 85 years old.⁽³⁾

Signs of Elder Abuse⁽⁴⁾

Physical



- Dehydration or unusual weight loss
- Unexplained injuries, bruises, cuts, or sores
- Missing daily living aids (e.g. glasses)
- Over or under medicating

Financial



- Sudden changes in spending, will, or other financial documents
- Unpaid bills
- Fraudulent signatures of financial docs
- Misuse of Power of Attorney

Psychological or Emotional



- Increased fear or anxiety
- Isolation from family & friends
- Unusual changes in behaviour or sleep
- Withdrawal from regular activities

Sexual



- Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind
- Inappropriate touching
- Joking of a sexual nature
- Sending or receiving sexually explicit photos

Neglect



- Not providing essentials, (i.e. food, liquids, clothing, hygiene)
- Denying access to required services (i.e. home care, medical care)
- Leaving the older adult in an unsafe place

RISK FACTORS

- Low income and few financial resources
- Low educational level
- Instability and/or shared living
- Social isolation or loneliness
- Age and/or gender
- Ethnicity and/or language
- Psychiatric illness
- Depression
- Cognitive impairment or confusion
- Aggressive behaviours by a person with dementia
- Poor physical health and/or frailty
- Functional dependence
- Drug and/or alcohol use
- Prior trauma or abuse
- History of intergenerational violence

- Shared living arrangements
- Family disharmony
- Poor or conflictual relationships
- Caregiver burden
- Dependency on others for daily activities
- Type of relationship between victim and abuser

- Limited or lack of social supports and networks
- Limited or lack of community resources
- Housing crisis (e.g., availability, affordability, etc.)
- Geographic location, home location

- Social and cultural norms
- Ageism
- Increased rates of poverty and social isolation due to COVID-19

INDIVIDUAL

RELATIONSHIP

COMMUNITY

SOCIETAL

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Improving knowledge of abuse
- Social participation
- Ability to seek help
- Maintaining healthy habits
- Financial stability

- Very good family relationship
- Availability of social supports

- Availability of community-based resources
- Services offered to older populations and their caregivers
- Community cohesion and collective efforts to support older adults

- Public awareness campaigns

Impacts of Elder Abuse

Elder abuse can lead to significant adverse health and social impacts, including:

- increased risk of premature death
- poor quality of life
- psychological distress and/or depression
- cognitive decline/dementia
- physical injury, disability, and/or health problems (e.g., headache, chronic pain)
- increased emergency room visits and/or hospitalizations
- social isolation and loneliness
- financial ruin
- loss of property and security
- premature nursing home placement
- decreased community involvement (activities, volunteering, workforce)
- societal costs (e.g., health care expenses)

What's being done in Grey Bruce?

The Grey Bruce Elder Abuse Prevention Network (GBEAPN) is made up of local stakeholders who are committed to delivering education and awareness, advocating for supports and services for older adults, and building a strong community response to assist older adults who may be experiencing or at risk of experiencing mistreatment.

Evidence-based recommendations to prevent elder abuse

Response to elder abuse requires a community-based approach that involves professionals from multiple sectors including health and social services, legal services, and the government.

Health promotion strategies:

- Provide education and increase public awareness on ageism and the aging process, including through World Elder Abuse Awareness Day campaigns and activities, and by promoting education on aging in school curriculums.
- Promote intergenerational activities that allow for shared experiences and engagement of younger people and older adults.

Education and training on the recognition and reporting of abuse:

- Provide education to older adults on their rights and on programs and services available to them.
- Provide education and support for caregivers and families of older adults to ensure proper care, to reduce stress and burnout, and to promote positive family dynamics.
- Provide education and training to caregivers, health providers, social service workers and law enforcement on recognition of the signs and risk factors for abuse; the ethical considerations involved; professional responsibilities; and the appropriate procedures and reporting pathways.

Risk assessment and screening detection tools:

- Select and promote the use of validated, culturally appropriate, and sector-specific screening/detection tools for community providers who interact with older adults, and provide education and training on appropriate use.

Response interventions:

- Provide support at the individual level to older adults who have been abused (education, psychological support, safe housing) and to the abuser (education, psychosocial/rehabilitation programs).
- Provide training for professionals of many sectors (health, social, legal) on appropriate response pathways and promote inter-professional, collaborated, coordinated responses.
- Promote policies and programs that address the social determinants of health and promote protective practices.
- Engage with older adults and service providers from culturally diverse communities to ensure their needs and perspectives are incorporated into elder abuse prevention and response strategies.

While the abuse of older adults is becoming more prevalent, everyone has a role to play in making sure people at every stage of life feel safe and valued in their homes and communities.



References

1. World Health Organization. (June 13, 2022). Abuse of Older People. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>
2. Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario. (2023). Learn the Facts. Retrieved from <https://eapon.ca/learn-the-facts/>
3. Grey Bruce Public Health. (2023). 2021 Census: Grey Bruce Population Overview. Owen Sound, Ontario: Grey Bruce Health Unit. Retrieved from <https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/1/Documents/Reports/2021%20Census%20Grey%20Bruce%20Population%20Overview.pdf>
4. Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario. (2023). Elder Abuse A Closer Look (Webinar Recording, Published on May 10, 2023). Retrieved from [EENet | Webinar recording: elder abuse: A closer look \(camh.ca\)](#)

For more information

Alguire, L. and Duivesteyn, T. (2024). Elder abuse prevention: Grey Bruce situational assessment and a review of the literature. Grey Bruce Public Health.



If you or someone you know wants to talk to someone about elder abuse, you can call:

Seniors Safety Line 24/7 at 1-866-299-1011
211, a free helpline 24/7 for information and support