**Elder abuse: A growing dilemma in an aging population**

CBC News: Mar 01, 2011 4:28 PM ET

As the baby boom generation ages, Canada is becoming an older country. According to Statistics Canada, eight million of us will be over the age of 65 by 2031. That's nearly 25 per cent of the population.

What's more, a growing number of those in this age bracket are reporting that they are the victims of abuse.

**Quick Stats**

* Seven per cent of older adults report some form of emotional and financial abuse by an adult child, spouse or caregiver.
* Seven per cent report emotional abuse, one per cent financial abuse and one per cent physical or sexual abuse.
* In 32 per cent of reported elder abuse cases, the offender is a family member (adult child, current or former spouse).

In 2007, Statistics Canada reported that the overall rate of police-reported violence against seniors **increased by 20 per cent between 1998 and 2005**.

Seniors are the least likely demographic to suffer violent crime, but they are most at risk of suffering **violence at the hand of a family member**.

For those over 65, **47 out of every 100,000 women** were violently assaulted by a family member, according to 2005 statistics. For men over the age of 65, **the figure was 36 cases** per 100,000 population.

The biggest perpetrators of violence against seniors were **adult children** (15 per 100,000 cases) or **a current or former spouse** (13 per 100,000).

Elder abuse can take several forms. Among them:

* **Neglect**: Signs include unkempt appearance, broken glasses, lack of appropriate clothing as well as malnutrition, dehydration and poor personal hygiene.
* **Physical Abuse**: Signs include untreated or unexplainable injuries in various stages of healing, limb and skull fractures, bruises, black eyes and welts.
* **Psychological/emotional abuse**: Watch for changes in behaviour (emotional upset/agitation resulting in sucking, biting, rocking), withdrawal or non-responsiveness.
* **Economic/financial abuse:** Watch for sudden changes in bank accounts or banking activity, and major changes to legal documents such as powers of attorney and wills.

The RCMP suggest that the strongest indicator that an elderly person is being abused is that he or she will tell someone.

In the wake of the recent case of a 68-year-old Toronto woman who was allegedly left alone in an uninsulated garage during the winter by her son and daughter-in-law, an advocacy group for seniors called on the federal government to do more to prevent elder abuse.

The group, known as CARP, Canadian Association of Retired Persons, wants changes to the Criminal Code to punish elder abuse and hotlines to make it easier for seniors to report problems.

"CARP is on the record calling for more services to support families dealing with the physical and mental challenges of their loved ones to help prevent tragedies like this one, and intervention agencies and services to provide a comprehensive response to a significant social problem," Susan Eng, the vice-president of advocacy for CARP, said.

"At some point, the heavy hand of the criminal law needs to be invoked, as it has been in this case, and legislative changes may be necessary to reflect society's values and abhorrence of such a situation."

**Most provinces and territories already offer some form of seniors' helpline** — but there is no national 24-hour hotline dedicated to helping seniors who are the victims of abuse, similar to rape crisis lines.

CARP would also like to see:

* The Criminal Code to be modified to include "duty to report" provisions modeled on requirements to report suspected cases of child or spousal abuse.
* A provision in the Criminal Code for crimes against the elderly that provide increased penalties, similar to tougher penalties that can be imposed for hate crimes.
* A new criminal office of Elder Abuse Victim.
* Support services and elder shelters.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

2017: [**Call the SENIORS SAFETY LINE**](http://www.elderabuseontario.com/what-is-elder-abuse/help-for-seniors/) [**1-866-299-1011**](tel:1-866-299-1011)

GREY-Bruce: **Seniors Advocacy and Awareness Network (SAAN)**  
Chairperson: Collen Purdon  
Tel: 519-376-1560  
Email:  [cpurdon@bmts.com](mailto:%20cpurdon@bmts.com)