



## Domestic Violence in Later Life

### FEATURED ARTICLE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OLDER ADULTS

Domestic violence does not just affect younger people. It affects all cultures, religions, races, sexual orientations and every age, including older adults.

Often we don't think that someone, especially a family member would violently assault or harm an aging parent or loved one. Unfortunately the abuse of older adults continues and is often at the hands of a family member, leaving the person to live in fear, silently suffering behind closed doors.

As the demographic shift continues, seeing an increase to our senior population, the likelihood of more domestic abuse occurring in the future increases.<sup>1</sup> Those working in the justice sector as well as health care professionals, are increasingly dealing with more and more cases of domestic violence, more so now than in the past.

Shelters are seeing an influx of older women seeking services and assistance, after experiencing domestic violence. In responding to this important social issue, we must ask ourselves: "Are we prepared, trained and are properly resourced to assist these older adults?"

Family violence occurs when someone engages in abusive behaviour to control and/or harm a member of their family or someone with whom they have an intimate relationship. It may include many different forms abuse ranging from physical and emotional to neglect being carried out (Dept. of Justice Canada, 2016)<sup>2</sup>. Those experiencing domestic abuse in later life, also have an on-going relationship with the abuser who is a 'trusted' individual, including a spouse or partner, family member, and/or caregiver.

According to the *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2013*, seniors represent a relatively small proportion of all family violence victims, about 3%, and experienced lower rates of family



violence than any other age group. While this rate appears low, family violence can have a significant negative impact on the health and well-being of the older adult.

Other findings reported by police, indicate that out of the 4 in 10 seniors, experiencing family

violence, the acts are committed primarily by their grown children (43%) and spouses (28%). Similarly as in the case of younger women, spousal violence for senior women was nearly double that of senior men.<sup>3</sup>

The complexities of Domestic Violence in Later Life differ from those towards younger people, particularly in the tactics used to take control of the older adult. An older adults' vulnerability to abuse increases, if there is dependency for care or if there are cognitive impairments due to stroke, dementia and/or physical disabilities that render them unable to protect themselves.

They also encounter significant barriers that inhibit their ability to seek help or report the abuse to authorities. When an older adult's own son or daughter is the person



causing them harm - the same person whom they nurtured and raised through life -

they find it extremely difficult to tell anyone what is happening. There are

overwhelming issues and fears such as: losing that family member in their life – often choosing to live with the abuse. The emotional anxiety of being rejected by other family members or the fear of starting over with little or no financial resources to do so, are all very real challenges and considerations for the older adult. Having to worry about housing or about being placed into a long-term care home, or not having knowledge about community supports and what will happen if reported or whether rights can be taken away or not.<sup>4,6</sup> Domestic violence may take on different forms at various stages in a person's later life.

The term *Domestic Violence Grown Old* is a longstanding phrase used for long-term spouses and intimate partner relationships, where abuse began and continued throughout the marriage. This is often referred to 'early-onset domestic violence'.

'Late-onset domestic violence' occurs in long-term relationships/marriages, which can unexpectedly lead to violence, perhaps triggered by an event or significant life change. Examples of such changes are: retirement, disability or having to care for the spouse in failing health. In addition, late onset violence may also be attributed to cognitive impairments common in aging, like those brought on by stroke, Alzheimer's Disease or substance abuse (alcoholism), causing aggressive and violent behaviors in otherwise ordinary, respectful marriages.<sup>5</sup>

The growth of the older adult population in Ontario, coupled with the number of new and complex cases of domestic violence coming to the attention of police, justice services and courts, highlights the

need to re-examine prevention and intervention programs. The following are a few key actions to support older adult victims of Domestic Violence:

- Community collaboration and a coordinated response with justice partners, community health and social service providers.
- New approaches/models to address high-risk complex cases. For example, Durham Region recently initiated 'Aged HART' (High Risk Action Review Team), a collaborative approach to older adults involved in the criminal justice system.
- Trainings on screening and assessment for domestic violence of older adults, for justice partners, health and social support services. In October 2015, EAO held a 2 day training on the Elder Abuse Risk Assessment Tool (EARA)
- Further education and outreach to older adults, to better understand the issue and gaining knowledge of how / where to seek support.
- Public Awareness Campaigns and availability of materials to bring greater awareness to this increasingly prevalent societal issue.

**Domestic violence in later life is a serious problem. Educate yourself to recognize the signs. Learn how you can be involved in supporting older victims of domestic violence.**



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Sev'er, A. 2009. "More than wife abuse that has gone old: A conceptual model for violence against the aged in Canada and the US. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*. Spring. Vol. 40, no. 2. p. 279-292.
- <sup>2</sup> [Department of Justice](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile](#), 2013 (Section Family violence against seniors)
- <sup>4,5</sup> And Then He Hit Me David France, January & February 2006
- <sup>6</sup> In Their Words National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life A project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence

## EAO Training: Domestic Violence and Older Adults

### EAO Webinar Series

#### Domestic Abuse and Older Adults

**Tuesday March 22, 2016**

11:00 AM -12:30 PM

**Margaret MacPherson,**

Community Research Associate  
Centre for Research & Education on  
Violence Against Women & Children  
(CREVAWC)

[\*\*REGISTER HERE\*\*](#)

### Conference Presentation

EAO will present and participate in a panel discussion:

*Domestic Violence Conference*

February 23, 2016

## EAO Website

Domestic violence resources may be found under EAO's [Directory of Tools & Resources](#), and more information under [Reports and Research](#).

## Websites of Interest

[Justice Canada](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada Stop Family Violence](#)

[The Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children](#)

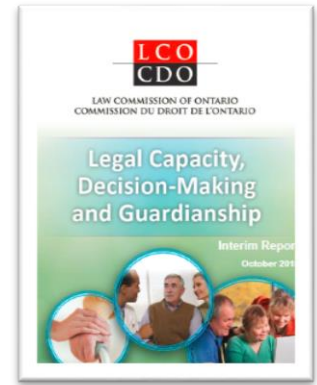
[VAWnet National On-Line Resource Centre on a Violence Against Women](#)



Law Commission of Ontario  
Commission du droit de l'Ontario

# Research & Reports

## Community Consultations :



The Law Commission of Ontario (LCO) released its [Interim Report](#) on *Legal Capacity, Decision-making and Guardianship* with an invitation to members of the public, including older adults and persons with disabilities, to participate in the consultation process.

The Interim Report includes draft recommendations designed to respond to concerns about Ontario's laws, addressing situations where decisions are needed but decision-making abilities by an individual are in question.

In particular, these concerns include:

- the misuse or abuse of Powers of Attorney (PoAs)
- the inappropriate or excessive intervention in the lives of persons with disabilities that may affect their decision-making abilities
- the means available to individuals and families to enforce rights or resolve disputes in this area, and the effective implementation of these laws.

## ONTARIO SENIORS' SECRETARIAT

Ontario is accepting applications for Seniors Community Grants to help more seniors stay active and engaged in their communities.

This year, the Seniors Community Grant Program will accept applications aimed at the planning and promotion of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2017.

- [Program guidelines](#) and get the [application form and guide](#) for the 2016 [Seniors Community Grant Program](#)
- [Information Sheet](#)

For more information, please visit the Ontario Seniors Secretariat's website at: [www.ontario.ca/seniors](http://www.ontario.ca/seniors).

**Applications will be accepted until March 4, 2016 at 5:00 pm.**

The LCO anticipates releasing a Final Report in 2017.

## **NATIONAL SENIORS STRATEGY**

*Make Addressing Ageism, Elder Abuse and Social Isolation a National Priority*

With a growing number of Canadians, health and social care professionals, economists, and national organizations are suggesting it's time for a National Senior Strategy. This website has been conceived as a way to provide an evidence-based view on how to consider the concepts that could and should be considered and included in a national approach. [Read here.](#)

## **ELDER ABUSE**

Mark S. Lachs, M.D., M.P.H., and Karl A. Pillemer, Ph.D.

The review summarizes research and clinical evidence on the extent, assessment and management of elder abuse, derived from our analysis of high-quality studies and recent systematic studies and reviews of the literature on elder abuse. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 2015; 373:1947-56. [Read More](#)

## **Webinar Proceedings:**

**Preventing Domestic Homicides: Lessons Learned from Tragedies -**  
by Dr. Peter Jaffe.

Listen [HERE](#) to a recording of the webinar and access the slide presentation and resources.

## ON-LINE RESOURCES



including issues families need to think about and ways to resolve their issues

- [As an Applicant](#) in a family court case
- [As a Respondent](#) in a family court case

Check CLEO resources by searching the [Legal Resources Catalogue](#) or order free CLEO resources using the [online ordering system](#).

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### Learning Network



An initiative based at the [Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children](#).

Increase the effectiveness and reach of public education and professional training materials developed to address violence against women.

[www.vawlearningnetwork.ca](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca)

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### Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA) National Elder Abuse Knowledge Sharing Hub



The Hub has elder abuse [resources](#) and [publications](#), blogs, listings of events in Canada as well as a discussion forum to connect visitors with colleagues across Canada. New material is added regularly (in both English and French languages).

Individuals are welcome to add resources, studies or projects to the Knowledge Hub! Or join the ranks of other guest bloggers and share what's on your mind. [Email CNPEA](#) for more details.

## Programs and Services



### Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Provincial Crisis and Support Line 1-866-887-0015

This support line is a live-answer, 24/7/365 multilingual service that supports male survivors of sexual abuse or those calling on their behalf. Information and referrals to almost fifty services across Ontario, offering professional support is available. These professional services help male survivors of sexual abuse, suffering from trauma, stigmatization, self-blame or shame.

Read announcement [Here](#) or [Read More](#) about the Program

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### Advocacy Centre for the Elderly



[ACE](#) has added a "1-855" Toll free number in efforts to make its service services for seniors more accessible to potential clients across Ontario. Scheduled intake days are Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

416-598-2656  
or  
1-855-598-2656

### LawConnect Promises Enhanced Public Legal Education in Ontario



[LawConnect](#) is a new collaboration between Ontario's leading public legal education and information (PLEI) organizations, Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) and Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO). OJEN delivers educational programs to schools and youth organizations, about the Ontario justice system. CLEO produces free print and online legal information resources on a variety of legal topics, including housing, family, social assistance and employment law.

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### New CLEO Resource on Family Law



CLEO has launched a new online resource: [Steps in a Family Law Case](#).

Three interactive flowcharts help people understand and work through the family law process:

- [Before you start](#), takes people through the opening stages,

## Upcoming Events & Conferences

### CAG 2016: FOSTERING INNOVATION IN RESEARCH ON AGING



45th Annual Scientific and  
Educational Meeting  
October 20-22, 2016  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

[Call for Abstracts](#)

**Deadline April 15, 2016**

### 2016 ANNUAL NICE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

**Coming of Age**  
May 16, 2016

Hart House, University of Toronto

For more details visit:  
[www.nicenet.ca](http://www.nicenet.ca)



### Webinar

[Seniors Reaching out to Seniors: An Elder Abuse Awareness and Financial Literacy Workshop Program for Older Adults](#)

**Wednesday, March 9, 2016**  
**1 pm - 2 pm (EST)**

The BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support will talk about engaging seniors against elder abuse through their Seniors Reaching Out to Seniors workshops

Advocacy and Support (BCCEAS) developed a workshop toolkit on elder abuse prevention. The workshop program utilizes the peer-to-peer model, with trained older adults delivering information on elder abuse prevention and financial literacy to their peers.

### SEXUAL CONSENT CONFERENCE 2016

**June 2 & 3, 2016**

Trent University  
Peter Gzowski College  
2510 Pioneer Rd.  
Peterborough, ON

The first conference in Central and Eastern Canada focused on the academic and community-based research of sexual consent, this conversation will explore intersectional, multi-sectoral understandings of this important topic.

For more details visit  
[sexualconsentconference.com](http://sexualconsentconference.com)

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