



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

## DIVISION OF AGEING

Under the Auspices of Senator The Honourable Donna Cox

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY (WEAAD) ONLINE Webinar Series: 15, 22, 23 & 30 July 2021

# Pandemic: Elder Abuse Prevention & Interventions During the COVID19 Pandemic: Insights from Barbados

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# COVID-19 Pandemic!

Older people are at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. COVID-19 is a new disease and we are learning more about it every day.

## Barbados

Among developing countries, **Barbados** now has one of the highest proportions of **older persons**, with **17 percent** of the **population aged 55** and over and nearly **11 percent** having reached or surpassed age 65.



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### What is Elder Abuse?

- Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.
- This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights and includes physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment; neglect; and serious loss of dignity and respect. (WHO)





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### Key Facts!

- Around 1 in 6 people 60 years and older experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the past year.
- Rates of elder abuse are high in institutions such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities, with 2 in 3 staff reporting that they have committed abuse in the past year.
- Rates of elder abuse have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Elder abuse can lead to serious physical injuries and long-term psychological consequences.
- Elder abuse is predicted to increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations.
- The global population of people aged 60 years and older will more than double, from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050.

(WHO)



# Types of Abuse- Prevalence

Type of abuse	Reported by older adults	Reported by older adults and their proxies	Reported by staff
<b>Overall Prevalence</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>Not enough data</b>	<b>64.2% or 2 in 3 staff</b>
Psychological abuse:	11.6%	33.4%	32.5%
Physical abuse:	2.6%	14.1%	9.3%
Financial abuse:	6.8%	13.8%	Not enough data
Neglect:	4.2%	11.6%	12.0%
Sexual abuse:	0.9%	1.9%	0.7%

# Abusive Acts!

- Abusive acts in institutions may include physically restraining patients, depriving them of dignity (for instance, by leaving them in soiled clothes) and choice over daily affairs
- Intentionally providing insufficient care (such as allowing them to develop pressure sores)
- Over- and under-medicating and withholding medication from patients; and emotional neglect and abuse.
- For older people, the consequences of abuse can be especially serious and convalescence longer.
- Relatively minor injuries can cause serious and permanent damage, or even death.
- A 13-year follow-up study found that victims of elder abuse are twice more likely to die prematurely than people who are not victims of elder abuse

# Risk Factors!

## Individual

- Poor physical and mental health
- Mental disorders, alcohol and substance abuse in the abuser
- Gender of the person: older men have the same risk of abuse as women, however, in some cultures where women may have inferior social status, are at higher risk of neglect and financial abuse (such as seizing their property) when they are widowed.
- Higher risk of more persistent and severe forms of abuse and injury.

# Risk Factors!

## Relationship

- A shared living situation is a risk factor for elder abuse.
- An abuser's dependency on the older person (often financial) also increases the risk of abuse.
- A long history of poor family relationships may worsen as a result of stress when the older person becomes more care dependent.
- as more women enter the workforce and have less spare time, caring for older relatives becomes a greater burden, increasing the risk of abuse.



# Risk Factors!

## Community

- Social isolation of caregivers and older persons
- Ensuing lack of social support
- Many elderly people are isolated because of loss of physical or mental capacity, or through the loss of friends and family members

## Sociocultural

- Ageist stereotypes where older adults are depicted as frail, weak and dependent

# Risk Factors!

## **Sociocultural (cont.)**

- Erosion of the bonds between generations of a family
- Systems of inheritance and land rights, affecting the distribution of power and material goods within families
- Migration of young couples, leaving older parents alone in societies where older people were traditionally cared for by their offspring
- Lack of funds to pay for care.

# Prevention!

- Public and professional awareness campaigns
  - Screening (of potential victims and abusers)
  - School-based intergenerational programmes
  - Caregiver support interventions (including stress management and respite care)
  - Residential care policies to define and improve standards of care
  - Caregiver training on dementia.
- Mandatory reporting of abuse to authorities
  - self-help groups
  - safe-houses and emergency shelters
  - psychological programmes for abusers
  - helplines to provide information and referrals
  - caregiver support interventions.

# Prevention!

Multiple sectors and interdisciplinary collaboration can contribute to reducing elder abuse, including:

- The social welfare sector (through the provision of legal, financial, and housing support)
- The education sector (through public education and awareness campaigns)
- The health sector (through the detection and treatment of victims by primary health care workers).

# Combatting Systemic Ageism!

Ageism impacts our health and well-being and it is a preventative barrier to enacting effective policies and taking action on healthy ageing. We must:

- Invest in evidence-based strategies to improve and assist.
- Improve data and research to help reduce it
- Build a movement to change the narrative around age and ageing (WHO, Global report on Ageing, 2021).

# Conclusion

- The elderly will be around for a long time. What does that mean?
- They are alive and should be treated with dignity and in a humane manner, afforded social justice and be able to complete their life course with a healthy quality of life.
- Who can be a part?
- All of us! Changing our thought patterns and resisting the urge to practice ageism.
- We are going to most likely belong to that population someday. Practice what you would like to see for yourself!

*Thank  
you*

