

ABOUT ELDER ABUSE



The Words of Our Elders

About Elder Abuse

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This booklet was developed with the support of the NWT Seniors' Society and the Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program. This project honors the voices of Northern Elders and was created to bring their wisdom, stories, and perspectives to a wider audience.



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Introduction

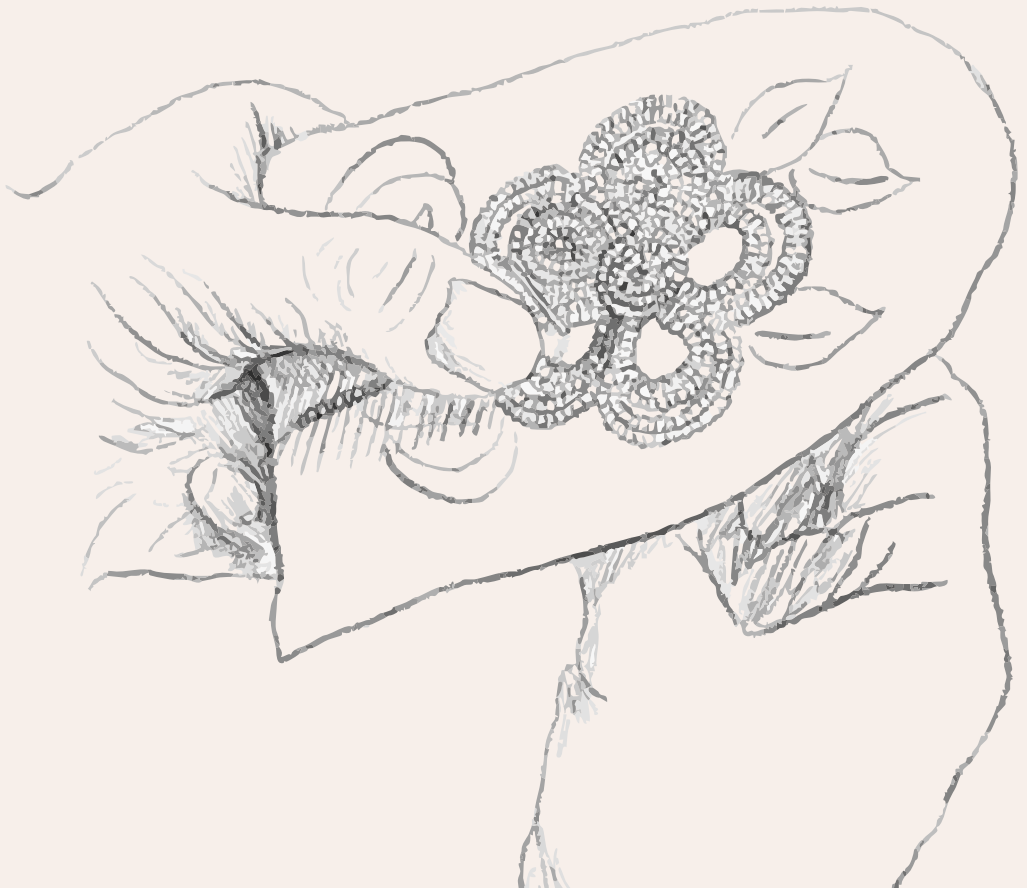
Twenty-six Indigenous Elders from four regions in the NWT participated in rewriting definitions of Elder Abuse in words that made sense to them. DeBeers Canada and New Horizons for Seniors funded the project. The NWT Seniors' Society facilitated three workshops, where Elders provided definitions, examples and scenarios.

Elder abuse can be committed by family, caregivers, other elders and friends. There is no single type of person who commits or is affected by elder abuse.

ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse can come in a variety of forms. It can be physical, emotional, financial, sexual, neglect, systemic along with other categories.

Elder abuse is a non-respectful, hurtful action or inaction by anyone towards an elder which causes harm (mind, body, soul, and spirit) and diminishes an older adult's sense of purpose as a knowledge holder or leader. Actions that make an elder feel uncomfortable, shy, scared, emotional, choked up, jumpy, shaky, withdrawn, and unappealing may be elder abuse.



Other examples of elder abuse include:

- When someone takes advantage of an elder by asking for things, money, baking, rides, not listening to older adults when they say no, etc.
- When someone talks to elders or bothers them in an unkind way.

Elders have a voice and follow adherence to natural law and a deep connection to the land.

Physical Abuse

The physical side of elder abuse is an action or threat of action that can cause physical pain or harm and may include:

- Any form of touch and rough handling that hurts, scares, or damages any part of a person's self and/or person's body or abilities.
- Where an elder experiences pain, fear, discomfort, due to violence such as pushing, pulling, slapping, punching, laying hands on the elder.

PHYSICAL ABUSE SCENARIO

It's a cool day in December, grandma is sitting in the living room in her own home drinking tea watching TV. Her son enters the house without knocking, asks her *"what you doing?"* She replies drinking tea and watching TV, she notices he is intoxicated. He replies loudly *"I asked you to meet you to meet me at the Northern Store!"* How come you didn't?

She said, *"I wasn't feeling well"* and he totally ignores her comments and thinks she is being a sissy. He yells at her *"you were supposed to meet me at the grocery store"* and tries to pull her out of her chair. She resists the

pulling and shoving and falls to the floor. He walks out of the house and slams the door.

“Definition- any action of abusing an elder person to cause physical pain!”



Emotional Abuse

The emotional side of elder abuse is an action that causes emotional suffering. Actions can be spoken or unspoken actions, inaction, or words that disrespect elders. These actions can be single or repeated. When a person's actions or behaviour towards an elder makes them feel small, childish, shame or not good enough this could be considered emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse includes:

- Threatening,
- Singled out,
- Scared.
- The elder is unable to speak or think or feel fear of a person (intimidated).
- Elders feel used or unwanted.
- Where the boundaries of an elder are not respected.

EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS MAY INCLUDE:

- Silent treatment,
- Yelling,
- Not respecting the boundaries of an elder.
- Isolating the elder from friends, family, and activities.

Some northern cultures believe that you need to respect the people ahead of you, be curious about your culture and natural laws, land, and nature. Elders are knowledge holders.

Systematic mental abuse includes racism, oppression, and colonization.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE SCENARIO

Brenda has a granddaughter, Sophia, that she loves and spends time with. When Brenda saw that Sophia's parents weren't getting along, she interfered, and the couple separated.

Sophia was upset with her grandmother and stopped speaking to her, giving her the silent treatment. Brenda was very upset because she felt that she had lost her granddaughter.



Financial Abuse

The financial side of elder abuse is the use of an elder's finances or material items without permission or with coerced permission or using or destroying material items and not replacing them. This includes money and possessions.

EXAMPLES OF FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Taking advantage of elder's resources like using all the gas in the snowmachine or eating all the elders' groceries.
- Destruction of property like tools, boats, snowmobiles, dogs etc.
- Stealing money from the elder either by using their banking information or stealing cash.

Financial abuse can be committed by:

- Family,
- Caregivers,
- Organizations

It is a breach of trust. It is considered an abuse of trust to use elder's money or belongings without their permission.

Resources are anything worth money including food, clothing, gas, not paying rent, taking an elder's money.

Other examples of financial abuse which elders are calling equipment abuse include when family members or others take an elder's equipment and return them damaged or without gas and refuse to pay for repairs, replacement, or gas.



FINANCIAL ABUSE SCENARIO 1

Sarah is an elder living in a small community. She lives in public housing. Someone she knows to be a drug dealer asks if they can move into her home. They tell her that they will pay for the rent, electricity, phone, cable, and internet and then she will have her money to spend on what she needs or wants.

She agrees.

The drug dealer moves in and is selling drugs out of her home putting her at risk. The drug dealer does not pay what they said, so now Sarah has to pay the expenses for two people and buy food. She is on a small pension and cannot keep up. She's going to lose her home if this doesn't change. She's afraid to report the drug dealer because he uses intimidation tactics to keep her in her place.

Sarah is being financially and emotionally abused.

FINANCIAL ABUSE SCENARIO 2

Jim, a twenty-year-old asks his grandmother for \$60 for school supplies. She agrees to give it to him. When she goes into online banking, she notices that the money has already been transferred to him.

Grandma asks him, did you already transfer the money? How did you get into my account?

Jim answers that he went into her computer, her client card number is already there, and she always uses the same password. He says, it was easy.

His Grandmother says this was planned and it is unauthorized use of her money. Jim swears it will never happen again.

Grandma changes her password. The trust between grandma and grandson is broken.



Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity directed towards an elder, man or woman, which occurs without their full knowledge and freely given sober consent. This can include:

- Unwanted bothering or touching,
- Verbal suggestions,
- Dirty jokes,
- Pornography,
- Uninvited gestures,
- Forcing alcohol on the elders for an ulterior sexual motive.

Isolation can lead to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse can also be learned behaviour from residential school in which addictions play a significant role.

SEXUAL ABUSE SCENARIO

Jeremy is an 80-year-old man. He lives by himself, and he is lonely. One day a young woman comes to his house. She knows he just received his pension, and she knows he is lonely. She offers sex for money. Jeremy is confused. He wants company but he doesn't understand the concept of paying for it. She tells him he is old and wrinkly and the only way he will ever have sex again is if he pays for it. He says no, so she says she won't visit him again unless he pays her for sex. He is lonely. He agrees. This is coerced consent, not given freely and therefore sexual abuse.

Neglect

Neglect is abuse. It is not providing elders with their basic need. This includes not providing the necessities required for a good quality of life. Whether it is intentional or unintentional, it is still neglect.

Neglect involves not providing the basic necessities required to survive. Family members and caretakers do not look after the needs of the elder, or they ask for money from the elder to look after their needs.

Neglect can be intentional or unintentional and can include actions that are inattentive to the needs of those who are dying. Examples include:

- Not shopping for elders.
- Not providing meals, food for those who cannot look after themselves.
- Elders are not included in gatherings.
- No help with household chores.
- No visitors, elders are ignored and isolated.
- Not providing the person with needs to ensure comfort.
- Not being given information about their health and what medical personal are doing (treatment).
- Not ensuring that older adults get their medications and are clean and have clean clothing and bedding etc.
- No transportation to attend family gatherings, meetings, and other events in the community.

NEGLECT SCENARIO

Mary is a 90-year-old woman who lives with her son. She has limited mobility and is bedridden a lot. She wears diapers and needs to be fed by hand. Her son loves her, but he doesn't have time to do all this.

One day a friend visits and Mary is crying. She says she's in pain. The friend turns her over, sees she's sleeping in feces and that she has bed sores that have become infected.

The friend changes her diaper and tries to alleviate the pain from the bedsores. She cannot, so she calls an ambulance so that Mary will be taken care of. When the friend confronts Mary's son, he is remorseful but says he can't handle her care on his own.

They all agree that Mary would be better taken care of in a facility with daily visits from family and friends.

*NOTE** Some participants were concerned by this scenario as they felt that it was unrealistic for someone who works full time to take care of their mother. They asked where homecare and other services were and why those weren't included in the scenario***



OTHER TYPES OF ABUSE OF ELDERS

NWT Elders who participated in the redefining project wanted other types of abuse included. They felt that there are other categories of elder abuse besides the ones mentioned above. They can be equipment, religious, cultural, technical, and technological.

Spiritual Abuse

Forcing beliefs on someone else and not respecting others' beliefs.

SPIRITUAL ABUSE SCENARIO

Doug has been going to church for years. He now lives with his niece, and he wants to attend church, but she tells him that church is stupid and won't let him attend.

Cultural Abuse

The cultural side of elder abuse is keeping elders away from traditions and not acknowledging their culture. It may include not providing traditional foods, telling someone that their culture is not relevant, or that it's wrong.

CULTURAL ABUSE SCENARIO

Mary and Brenda have been friends for many years. They grew up together and both love to catch whitefish and prepare them for their family. Mary's mother taught her how to prepare whitefish and Brenda's mother taught her how to prepare whitefish. Both ways are very different. Brenda gets frustrated with Mary when Mary prepares the fish the way she was taught and tells Mary she's doing it wrong. Brenda takes the fish and does it her way. This has been happening for years, but Mary is feeling put down by this.

Technological Abuse

Technological abuse is when elders can't participate fully in society because they do not understand the technology but require technology to participate. It includes:

- Elders require technology to effectively participate in society, but there are no clear instructions on how to use the technology and the risks associated with the technology. There is no one who can help available.
- Someone is visiting and focusing on their phone or tablet and not the elder.

TECHNICAL ABUSE SCENARIO

John is applying for a GNWT program to help him get some household needs. He is told the only way to apply is online. John doesn't have a computer and doesn't know how to apply online. He asks for help from the GNWT, but there is no one to help. John doesn't get the program because he can't apply.



Systemic Abuse

Systemic abuse is when a race or group of people are taken advantage of by a system of government and not provided appropriate support, programs and services based on race, age, and mental capacity etc. It demeans elders as they try to navigate a system that is inherently racist, ageist and sexist.

The systemic side of elder abuse includes many things including government red tape, abuse of traditional knowledge and cultural appropriation. It leaves an elder feeling diminished.

EXAMPLES OF SYSTEMIC ABUSE INCLUDE:

- Government red tape is where the government complicates application processes and does not provide appropriate help when older people need to apply for programming. This leaves the elder without the support of the program because they do not know how to apply. Elders are judged based on race, age, dress, and hair. This is a form of ageism and racism and is systemic abuse.
- Abuse of traditional knowledge is when non-indigenous professionals gather traditional knowledge from Indigenous elders and use it to progress in their career by advancing their education or professional opportunities.

- Cultural appropriation is when non-indigenous people learn the arts, crafts and traditions of elders and create these arts and crafts to sell and provide others with information on the traditions for money. There is a loss of revenue by elders whose arts and crafts and traditions are part of their culture.

The above are a few examples of a system/society that takes advantage of elders and is systemic abuse.



A project of the NWT Seniors Society
written by the Elders of the Northwest Territories