

QLD Focus

Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Newsletter

Edition 8

March 2006

Back to Basics of Elder Abuse

Community awareness of elder abuse has come a long way since EAPU's humble beginnings in 1997. Nowadays it is difficult to find a group of people who haven't heard about the existence of elder abuse, have no idea of what it entails or do not recognise its severity and implications to the individual, the family and the community.

Recent exposure by the media of heinous crimes committed against very vulnerable older people, catapulted the issue to dominate public and government agendas. It was also the culmination of a steady shift of service providers' concerns towards issues of duty of care, confidentiality and legal ramifications.

It could be the right time to step back, take a deep breath, revisit the basics and get in touch with the holistic framework of elder abuse.

The commonly accepted definition of elder abuse in Australia is:
"Any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person"

Elder abuse is regarded as part of the wider social issue of domestic and family violence. However, relationships that imply trust could extend in older age to include non-family members like friends, neighbours, community volunteers, informal & paid carers as well as paid service providers. These relationships usually work very well and are the backbone of our society, therefore, when abuse occurs and trust is broken the emotional, physical and financial toll could be enormous and devastating.

Criminal acts by strangers and self-neglect are not generally considered to be within the scope of this definition. Nevertheless, when self neglect or a criminal act occur to older people, we need to address it regardless of whether it fits into the definition or not.

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QUOTE:

"Never have children, only grandchildren".
Gore Vidal



ELDER ABUSE
HELPLINE

1300 651 192

Back to Basics of Elder Abuse (...continued)

Types of elder abuse include Psychological (mental, emotional, verbal), Financial, Physical, Social, Sexual and Neglect. Elder abuse could happen to people from all educational, socio-economical and cultural backgrounds and it is estimated to affect 25,000 older people in Queensland, which could be just the tip of the iceberg.

Anecdotal and some empirical data demonstrate that abuse by people in a trusting relationship is rarely perceived as crime or fraud, and could be excused and tolerated by the victims. There are many other contributors to the hidden nature of elder abuse: (i) it is only recently that the awareness of its existence has come to public notice; (ii) older people largely regard family as sacred and could have feelings of guilt, shame or self blame; (iii) some victims could be socially isolated, dependent on carers or fearing retribution; (iv) older people may not be aware of options and could prefer the devil they know to the unknown; (v) the general disempowerment of older people in our society and, last but not least, (vi) language and cultural barriers.

Each type of abuse could be alerted to by its specific signs but generally, any changes from the norm could indicate that something is not right. For instance, we could note changes in ones appearance, mood swings, absence from preferred activities, sudden inability to pay for services, unexplained injuries and the incongruence between verbal & non-verbal communication, to name just a few of the signs (EAPU fact sheets).

There is of course the danger of jumping to conclusions, because each of the signs could have other explanations than abuse. Nevertheless, they may indicate that there are issues that need addressing regardless of the causes e.g. medical (both physical & mental), loneliness, feelings of grief and loss, financial crisis, unresolved issues from the past, other family member's crisis and so on.

Therefore it is imperative to consider and weigh our response so that by striving to improve a person's well being we don't make the situation worse. We should be careful not to impose our own values and belief systems on others and consider safety issues for the person who is abused, the safety of others involved as well as our own.

Raising awareness in the community of how to prevent abuse makes a lot of sense because once abuse has occurred it could be possible to stop it but very difficult to heal broken hearts & relationships, to compensate for financial losses and to reclaim ones control over their life. Therefore, people should remain connected in the community, be informed about their rights and options and use strategies that empower them to break down myths about ageing.

For discussing situations of elder abuse, for more information about elder abuse prevention, for requesting awareness raising sessions for your group or for booking training sessions for your staff, please call our Helpline on 1300 651 192.

Maya Zetlin, Project Officer

Project Officer Elder Abuse Prevention Unit



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day June 15, 2006

"My World,...Your World... Our World - Free of Elder Abuse"

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse



Core Campaign Message

Purpose and Aspiration of Core Message

The key objective of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is to raise awareness of elder abuse (which encompasses neglect and mal- or mistreatment) throughout the world. To do this effectively, and in a co-ordinated fashion for maximum international impact and solidarity, the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), together with the international members of the WEAAD Steering Committee, are suggesting participants adopt a core message, and set of sub-messages. These develop the generic aim of 'raising awareness' and help enable a development of awareness into action.

The core message should be used in conjunction with the WEAAD theme:

"My World,...Your World... Our World – Free of Elder Abuse"

The proffered core message will narrow down and focus the objective of raising awareness, whilst remaining sufficiently broad to encompass national priorities, diversity and culture without exclusion. It may be used in a variety of contexts to motivate and inspire; and it will facilitate the illustration of a compelling aspect of elder abuse common to all nations, and all victims. It will appeal to and have meaning for audiences of professionals, older people, and the general public.

The core message is easily adaptable for use in media communications, publications, presentations and interviews.

Core Message: **Never ignore elder abuse.**

Sub-messages:

- Most elder abuse is hidden.
- Ageism (age discrimination) is a major cause of elder abuse.
- Ageism and disempowerment lead to elder abuse being hidden.
- Empowering older persons is the most effective tool in the response to elder abuse.

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World Elder Abuse Awareness Day June 15, 2006

**The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
(continued)**



Context of Core Message

The nature of abuse as a hidden problem is now universally accepted. INPEA, as co-author of the report *Missing Voices* (2002) with the World Health Organization, states that “abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of elders are much more common than societies admit”. *Missing Voices* demonstrates clear links between elder abuse, and disempowerment and discrimination.

Awareness into Action

INPEA agrees with the statement in *Missing Voices* that, “Ultimately the challenge for us all is not only to listen to what has been said, but to believe and act upon it”. The following are paraphrased proposed strategies from the report. INPEA will support the development of action to bring about achievement of these strategies as a result of WEAAD:

- **Empowerment of Elders:**
To enable older adults to act for themselves and on their own behalf. To enable older adults to exercise their rights and advocate for their own interests.
- **Awareness:**
To ensure that the general population is aware that elder abuse happens and is a problem. Older adults need to be aware of the problem and of their rights, as well as available services and resources.
- **Education:**
To educate people to perceive older people more favourably as positive contributors to society. To educate and train people, including professionals involved in the care of older people, to recognise and act on abuse or suspicions of abuse.
- **Intergenerational Relationships:**
This is linked to awareness and education, and places an emphasis on the need to encourage closer and positive contact between generations and to foster positive attitudes among youth. The social isolation and neglect of older adults needs to be broken, through intergenerational relationships, among others.

Ryan Sampson
Age Concern England
WEAAD Steering Committee
INPEA
February 2006

From the Editor:

Domnica Alexa (domnica.alex@lccq.org.au)



As the new person in the EAPU I have had the privilege of meeting so many wonderful people passionate about making this Australia a safer and happier place for all people.

I am delighted to work in an organisation that not only is genuine about working with and for older people but most importantly listens to them.

I have big shoes to fill after the exceptional standards Nick Harris has set for "Qld Focus". His efforts and hard work I am sure have not gone unnoticed. Nick has gone back to university and we wish him well in his studies.

On another very impressive and news worthy note, I would like to congratulate Maya Zetlin and Les Jackson for reaching a landmark 5 years with Elder Abuse Prevention Unit. You are both greatly valued and appreciated. Thank you for your hard work and effort your contribution has not gone unnoticed.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite you all to consider activities for the up-coming World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June. Please forward your ideas and suggestions to us at the EAPU.

I look forward to hearing from you all.

Domnica Alexa
Project Officer

TIME FOR GRANDPARENTS PROGRAM

Provided by Senior's Enquiry Line 1300 135 500



Free school holiday, weekend and after school activities are now available in Queensland for children who are being raised by their grandparents.

In recognition of the importance of supporting families where children are being raised by their grandparents, Seniors Enquiry Line in partnership with the Queensland Government and key service providers are trialling the "Time For Grandparents Program". This program funded by the Department of Communities is designed to provide the children of these families with fun and interesting activities and give grandparents the opportunity to have some well earned time out. Alternatively, grandparents may also enjoy attending these activities with their children. Combined grandparent and grandchildren camps are also available.

Grandparents who are the primary carers and not receiving foster or relative carer payments are eligible to access the Time for Grandparents Program..

For all bookings and enquiries please contact **Seniors Enquiry Line 1300 135 500 Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.**

ROLE OF INVESTIGATIONS WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE ADULT GUARDIAN

Contributed by Julie Newton (Office of the Adult Guardian)

Investigating allegations of neglect, exploitation or abuse of adults with impaired decision making capacity is one of the Adult Guardian's key functions.

The Adult Guardian is an independent statutory officer responsible for protecting the rights and interests of adults who are unable to make decisions for themselves. Lack of decision making capacity may be the result of intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, acquired brain injury, dementia or temporary illness such as delirium.

The Adult Guardian has discretion to investigate a complaint or an allegation that an adult with impaired capacity is being neglected, exploited or abused. Matters investigated include allegations of financial abuse, inappropriate personal or financial decision making, neglect and self neglect as well as physical and sexual abuse.

The Adult Guardian will proceed with an investigation if the outcome would be likely to achieve a positive outcome for the adult.

The Adult Guardian's investigative powers are outlined in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000*. The powers include:

- Right to information
- Notice to produce records and information
- Summons to give evidence
- Whistleblower protection
- Penalties apply to vexatious complaints and obstructing investigations

There can be a number of outcomes to investigations completed by the Office of the Adult Guardian. These include:

- No investigation – insufficient grounds
- Provision of advice and directions to attorneys, guardians and administrators regarding their responsibilities
- Monitoring and supervising an attorney, guardian or administrator over a period of time
- Referral to service support agencies
- Referral to other professional bodies
- Suspension of attorney's power
- Referral to the Police
- Making an application to the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal for the appointment of an administrator or guardian
- Requesting the return of money to the person

All complaints remain confidential unless the person making the complaint agrees otherwise and information obtained during an investigation cannot be accessed under Freedom of Information.

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ROLE OF INVESTIGATIONS WITHIN THE OFFICE OF THE ADULT GUARDIAN (cont.)

Statistics

At present five investigators carry out State-wide investigations on behalf of the Adult Guardian. Each investigator has a caseload of approximately 35 investigations.

The year 2004-05 saw 447 matters investigated for 309 clients of whom 194 were new clients. Over half (55%) of the investigations conducted related to financial abuse by attorney appointed under an Enduring Power of Attorney or informal financial managers. Approximately half of the matters referred to the investigations unit involved an adult with impaired capacity over the age of 65. Dementia is the most prominent reason for impaired capacity in investigation matters.

INVESTIGATION CASE STUDY

A referral was received from a financial institution concerning a 70-year-old man called Andrew who had been a longstanding customer for many years. It was well known by staff that Andrew had no family. The financial institution became concerned that Andrew was being financially exploited when, over a period of several months it was identified that Andrew was making unusually large withdrawals of cash several times a day accompanied by a strange woman. Staff from the financial institution were also concerned that Andrew's capacity may be impaired as he presented as being confused and disoriented to time and place on occasions.

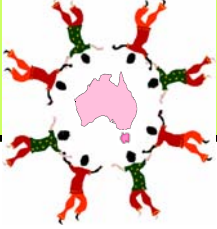
Andrew's spending behaviour had been very conservative over the years and the financial institution became alarmed when it was identified that \$30,000 had been withdrawn from Andrew's account over several months.

The Office of the Adult Guardian negotiated with community health care agencies to verify Andrew's capacity and also to confirm whether Andrew had any family or friends who could provide information about the person accompanying Andrew to the financial institution.

It was confirmed that Andrew had dementia and that he had no recollection of withdrawing large amounts of money. Andrew was however able to identify the woman who had befriended him and accompanied him to the financial institution. The Office of the Adult Guardian organised for the Public Trustee of Queensland to be appointed as Andrew's financial manager and to protect Andrew from any further exploitation.

(*The case study is a composite of a typical investigation client. The case has been de-identified and the client's details have been changed to protect their identity and confidentiality)

For more information the Office of the Adult Guardian is based in Brisbane and can be contacted via phone, 3234 0870 or 1300 653 187 or via email adult.guardian@justice.qld.gov.au or at www.justice.qld.gov.au



ANPEA – The Missing Link

By Les Jackson (EAPU—Senior

Just when I was starting to feel a bit more confident that the EAPU has a reasonably good handle on what is happening around the country, something like the “World Elder Abuse Awareness Day” crops up and we had no idea that there was such a thing. The EAPU is usually able to keep abreast of elder abuse events, issues and trends but we missed this big one, why? I see that there are two main reasons for this:

- * *Reason One* is that the first cut-backs that any organisation undertakes when trying to stretch limited resources is to reduce its Research & Development (R&D) areas and the EAPU is no exception. The “luxury” of undertaking active research, sussing out trends and new initiatives and developing new resources has unfortunately been buried under increasing demand and resulting focus on delivering core services. Although the EAPU is committed to developing Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander resources, this will be the extent of our R&D capacity for the foreseeable future.
- * *Reason Two* is that we have been sadly missing the original network that gave us the most commonly used definition of elder abuse in Australia i.e. the Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse or ANPEA. This was mainly an information sharing network with links to Australia’s representative to the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA). This vital link between international and national information sharing on elder abuse issues unfortunately ceased to function as a recognisable network three or four years ago. However, many of the people (and the agencies they represented) who made up the ANPEA network I find are still around and just as passionate about elder abuse issues.

There seems to be growing interest across Australia in restarting ANPEA or a similar type of network/organisation and I believe it can’t happen quick enough. Unfortunately the ability to maintain a pulse through a network does require considerable time and effort, a commodity available to few, if any, of us. I think that it is time to see an Australian Elder Abuse Clearing House that could also host ANPEA. There are several countries that have these for elder abuse and I believe that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments could easily fund a similar set-up for Australia.

The Minister for Aging, Santo Santoro, in his media release (21 February 2006) has advised that he is “considering proposals in addressing key issues relating to elder abuse”. This is an opportunity for the Federal government to facilitate a network for key stakeholders in prevention and intervention of elder abuse would encourage open discussion and proactive intervention on issues faced across Australia.

Media Overview



Call for mandatory reporting of elderly abuse complaints

<http://abc.net.au/news/australia/nsw/riverina/200603/s1594086.htm>

Minister calls for zero tolerance on elder abuse

<http://abc.net.au/news/australia/qld/goldc/200603/s1592146.htm>

Police investigate suspicious retirement village death. 21/03/2006. ABC News Online

<http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1596981.htm>

Minister expects support for aged care changes. 16 March 2006. Gold Coast News

<http://abc.net.au/news/australia/qld/goldc/200603/s1592922.htm>

Nursing home worker faces rape charges

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1597156.htm>

PM - Aged care complaints system needs reform: Knowles

<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2006/s1592659.htm>

Maruff House sale recommendation worries Meals on Wheels. 15/03/2006. ABC News Online

<http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1592169.htm>

Aged care reforms need state cooperation, Santoro says. 15/03/2006. ABC News Online

<http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1591719.htm>

Dems call for dementia drug probe

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,18522933-1702,00.html?from=rss>

Aged care workers threaten action

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,18395045-1243,00.html?from=rss>

Minister defends aged care stand

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,18221524-1243,00.html?from=rss>

Calls for action on aged care scandal

<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,18220621-1243,00.html?from=rss>

Research Roundup

by Domnica Alexa (EAPU - Project Officer)

Brandl, B. (2005). Mandatory Reporting on Elder Abuse: Implications for Domestic Violence Advocates. *National Clearinghouse on Abuse in later Life.*

The US has introduced mandatory reporting legislation for elder abuse in the majority of states. This article outlined the effects this has had on elderly people seeking assistance from domestic violence advocates.

Brandl (2005) identified that the most significant argument in favour of mandatory reporting was the increase in reports of elder abuse. However, the increase in reports of elder abuse has had wide spread implications, from resourcing, staffing and investigations.

The increase in reports of elder abuse has implications from lack of knowledge of professionals, as to who precisely is mandated to report, what they are mandated to report and when they are to report. For instance, the inconsistency across US states in which professionals are mandated to report would mean that some elders may not be reported merely because they saw a counsellor instead of a social worker, or a domestic violence service. Also some states only report elder abuse which is covered under criminal behaviours.

Issues in relation to resources has identified that that there is a strain on funds available to effectively prevent, investigate and provide appropriate intervention for victims of elder abuse. The lack of resources has had a negative impact on service delivery for elder abuse.

Office of Senior Victorians. (2005). Elder Abuse Prevention: Consultation Paper— August 2005. Hampton Press Pty Ltd.

The purpose of this paper was to assess community resources and awareness of elder abuse and to “strengthen service responses.” The article outlines the background of elder abuse prevalence in Victoria and Australia. These included: research into prevalence and reporting mechanism of elder abuse in Victoria.

This article also identified risks and strategies for future actions to increase awareness and proactively work towards reducing incidences of elder abuse, such as education of senior Victorians, educating the public, mediation, educating professionals (eg, including elder abuse curriculum in tertiary courses) and abuser treatment programs.

Biviano, N. (1996). Abuse of the Non-Institutionalised Aged: Dilemmas of policy and practice. *Australian Social Work*, 49(4), 41-46.

This article “explored Australian responses to the problem of abuse of the non-institutionalised aged.” It outlines that structural policies would provide a more realistic approach in policy development and implementation. The major issues observed are: the lack of available and affordable services to meet the needs of an aging population and a lack of education of the elderly and community regarding what it means to age and issues related to aging and elder abuse.

Nancey Biviano (1996) identified that Australia does not have legislation mandating reporting of elder abuse. She explained the concept of mandatory reporting as based on the child protection system and the implications such as loss of dignity and freedom of choice, as well as the increased need to provide training in relation to what was to be reported, who had to report and the implications of appropriately ensuring that professionals did report elder abuse.

Upcoming Events

Breakfast Colloquium 2006 Program

5 April, 10 May, 14 June, 12 July, 9 August, 6 September
Customs House, 399 Queen Street, Brisbane
Phone: 3346 9084
Email: acaevents@uq.edu.au
Website: <http://www.uq.edu.au/aca/index.html?page=27255&pid=9185>

Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA) 1st National Community Care Conference

3 - 5 May 2006
Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA) 'Riding the Wave of the Future'
Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour, NSW
Phone: 02 9799 0900
Email: events@agedservices.asn.au

Retirement Living Conference 2006

11 - 12 May 2006
Surfers Paradise, Marriott Hotel, Gold Coast
Website: www.acqi.org.au/conferences

Connecting Intergenerational Communities Through Creative Exchange Conference

26 - 29 June 2006
Connecting Intergenerational Communities Through Creative Exchange Conference
Victoria University, Level 12, 300 Flinders St, Melbourne
Victoria University Conference Management Services
460 Ballarat Rd, Sunshine Vic 3020
Phone: +61 3 9919 7249
Email: conferences@vu.edu.au
Website: <http://conferences.vu.edu.au/icip>

Queensland Law Society Conference

Growing old can be fun, legal planning for a positive future.
Thursday 29th June, 2006
QLS Auditorium
Website: www.qls.com.au

Nurses in Management Aged Care Conference and Trade Exhibition 2006

10 - 11 August 2006
Conrad Jupiters, Gold Coast
Website: <http://www.acqui.org.au/conferences>

Australian Society for Geriatric Medicine 2006 Annual Scientific Meeting

4 - 6 September 2006
Christchurch Convention Centre, New Zealand
Phone: (02) 9437 9333
Email: emma@conferenceaction.com.au
Website: www.asgm.org.au

Aged and Community Services Australia's (ACSA) 19th National Conference

17- 20 September 2006
Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, Gold Coast
Phone: 07 3725 5588
Email: events@acqi.org.au
Website: www.acqconferences.com.au

3rd International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity

13 - 15 October 2006
Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre, Vic, Australia
Conference Secretariat, PO Box A2261 Sydney South NSW 1235 Australia
Phone: (02) 6685 4422
Email: info@longevity-international.com,
registrations@longevity-international.com
Website: www.longevity-international.com

EAPU hopes you have enjoyed the first edition of "Queensland Focus" for 2006. If you wish to become an online recipient please email the EAPU to join the mailing list.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit is funded by the Queensland Government Department of Communities and operates under the auspice of Lifeline Brisbane.

Editors Note: Opinions expressed in this edition "Queensland Focus", do not necessarily reflect those of The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit (EAPU). Articles in this newsletter may be used with the permission of the contributing author.



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