



Serving the needs of older people

1

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
15 June 2012

Background:

**About elder abuse
and neglect**

Older people matter



On 15 June 2012, Age Concern New Zealand takes part in the seventh annual international campaign to raise awareness of elder abuse and neglect.

It is a global problem. International research estimates that between 3% and 10% of the older population experience some form of abuse or neglect.

However, much abuse goes unreported. It has been estimated that only 16 per cent of all abuse incidents reach service agencies. These referrals represent only the 'tip of the iceberg'.¹

Supporting World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 15 June 2012

Age Concern New Zealand is part of the worldwide effort to prevent elder abuse and neglect. We promote the rights and wellbeing of older people/kaumātua and those who care for them. Through our work we encourage social and physical wellbeing and challenge ageist attitudes.



What is elder abuse and neglect?

Elder Abuse and Neglect 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. It can be of various forms: physical, psychological/ emotional, sexual, or financial/material abuse, and/or intentional or unintentional neglect².

To mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention Services are distributing purple ribbons and encouraging local authorities and organisations to light up their buildings and public spaces with purple lights on the 15th of June.

For more information on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, local activities and local contacts, see

www.ageconcern.org.nz

¹ National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, National Center for Elder Abuse USA 1998

² Definition from Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2002

Older people matter

There are many reasons why elder abuse occurs. It often stems from attitudes that are ageist, attitudes that do not value or respect older people/ kaumātua. This is why Age Concern focuses on promoting respect of older people/kaumātua as a way to reduce the incidence of elder abuse.



Valuing older people is respecting their dignity

This means older people/ kaumātua:

- are treasured and respected
- are valued for who they are and treated fairly
- live safely, free from exploitation and abuse
- receive care and support when needed
- make their own choices and decision
- have their physical, spiritual, cultural and emotional needs met
- are included in conversations
- are involved in decisions that affect them
- are part of their community

Who is likely not to be valued, and to be abused?

Elder abuse can happen to any older person/ kaumātua. It happens to men and women of every religious, cultural, ethnic and income group.

How can I tell if someone is being abused or neglected?

The following signs MAY indicate an older person/kaumātua is being abused:

- unexplained behaviour, sleeping or eating habits
- withdrawal and/or edginess
- fear of a particular person
- confusion
- unexplained injuries
- drowsiness (due to over-medication)
- recoiling from touch
- unusual withdrawals from bank accounts
- unpaid bills, lack of money for necessities

© Age Concern New Zealand 2012

This information is the intellectual property of Age Concern New Zealand.

It may be **quoted** only with acknowledgement of Age Concern New Zealand's authorship.

It may not be **reproduced** (including any translation, editing or reformatting) without the written permission of the Chief Executive of Age Concern New Zealand.

What is abuse?

Psychological Abuse

Behaviour causing mental anguish, stress or fear. For example:

- ridicule or threats
- harassment or humiliation
- preventing choice or decision-making
- withholding affection.

Financial Abuse

Illegal or improper use of money, property or other resources. For example:

- unauthorised taking of money or possessions
- misuse of power of attorney
- failing to repay loans
- use of home and/or utilities without contributing to costs.

Physical Abuse

Infliction of pain, injury or use of force. For example:

- hitting, pushing, rough handling
- over-medication
- inappropriate use of restraints or confinement.

Neglect

Not providing for physical, emotional or social needs. For example:

- inadequate food, clothing, shelter
- lack of social contact, support
- health needs not attended to.

Sexual Abuse

Non-consensual sexual acts or exploitive behaviours. For example:

- inappropriate touching
- sexual acts with someone unable to give consent

Institutional Abuse

A policy or accepted practice within an organisation that disregards the rights of or harms an older person/kaumātua. For example:

- routines that do not respect a person's culture or customs
- rationing of continence products

What are the effects of elder abuse?

The personal losses associated with abuse can be devastating and include the loss of independence, homes, lifesavings, health, dignity, and security.³

Abuse can destroy a kaumātua/older person's self-esteem and confidence. It also damages family/whānau relationships, the kaumātua/older person's financial security, and their mental and physical health, increasing the likelihood that they will require residential care.⁴

Why don't people report elder abuse?

Some of the reasons why elder abuse is not reported are because the older person/kaumātua:

- blames themselves for the abuse
- is ashamed that the abuser is a family/whānau member
- depends on the abuser for support
- has low self-confidence and self-esteem
- does not want to make a fuss
- is afraid that if they complain the abuse will get worse
- is isolated, so that it is difficult for them to tell anyone
- does not know who to tell or how to get help
- has dementia or an illness prevents them from telling anyone

Show you value older people/ kaumātua by:

- respecting their customs
- listening to them
- including them in conversations and decision-making
- learning from their experiences
- treasuring them and treating them with respect and dignity
- ensuring they can live safely in their home
- supporting them to get assistance when needed

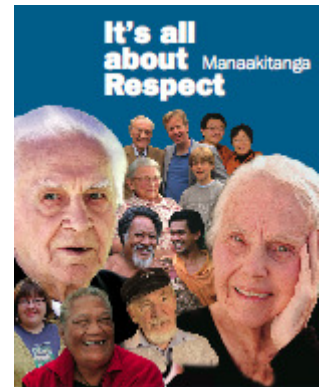
³ *What is Elder Abuse?* National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (© 2008).
<http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/>

⁴ *Family Violence Intervention Guidelines: Elder Abuse and Neglect*, 2007, p 14.

What can we do about elder abuse?

Age Concern elder abuse and neglect prevention services receive an average of four calls a day about older people/kaumātua who may be being abused or neglected.

It doesn't have to be that way. You can help end elder abuse and neglect.



If you suspect that an older person/kaumātua is being abused or neglected...

Don't let your fear of meddling in someone else's business stop you from speaking out. Encouragement and support is a really important way you can help an older person/kaumātua to take action in the face of mistreatment.⁵

If you feel you are being abused or neglected...

Your personal safety is most important. Talk to someone you trust about the abuse if you can do this safely. If your abuser is threatening you if you tell anyone, ask anyone you have a chance to speak to alone to contact your nearest Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention Service, Age Concern, or the police.

If you feel you have been abusive or are in danger of abusing an older person/kaumātua in your life...

There is help available if you have been abusive to an older person/kaumātua or if you feel you want to hurt someone you are caring for. Caring for an older person/kaumātua can be a really hard job - you deserve support too. Talk with someone who can help. Phone the Carers New Zealand helpline (0800 777 797) or your local Age Concern.

If you recognize that abuse, neglect, or violence is a way you often solve problems, you will need expert help to break old patterns. Talk with someone who can help or phone the Family Violence Helpline - 0800 456 450.

⁵ Mowlam, A., Tennant, R., Dixon, J., McCreddie, C., UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People: Qualitative Findings, Kings College of London and the National Centre for Social Research, August 2007, page 36

Services preventing elder abuse and neglect

Specialist elder abuse and neglect prevention services operate in many major cities and provincial areas throughout New Zealand. Contact details are available at www.ageconcern.org.nz

The services work with older people/kaumātua, their families/whānau and carers supporting them to change their situation so they can all be safer. They provide free, confidential support, advocacy and information, linking with services in the community to help where appropriate.

Elder abuse and neglect prevention services also provide education for people working with and caring for older people/kaumātua, and public awareness-raising activities aimed at early identification and prevention of elder abuse or neglect.

Turning awareness into action

Effective prevention of elder abuse and neglect requires a contribution from all sectors of society. Age Concern New Zealand supports and encourages continued networking, increased debate and further research and service development to enhance prevention activities. A multidisciplinary response across all sectors is needed to:

- empower older people/kaumātua to act for themselves and on their own behalf, to exercise their rights and advocate for their own interests
- raise awareness amongst the general population that elder abuse and neglect happens and is a problem
- educate those working with older people/kaumātua to recognise signs of possible abuse and to know how to respond appropriately
- prevent abuse or neglect through changing ageist attitudes and behaviour, and encouraging positive intergenerational relationships

"Ultimately the challenge for us all is not only to listen to what has been said, but to believe and act upon it"
(Missing Voices, INPEA and WHO, 2002).

© Age Concern New Zealand 2012

This information is the intellectual property of Age Concern New Zealand.

It may be **quoted** only with acknowledgement of Age Concern New Zealand's authorship.

It may not be **reproduced** (including any translation, editing or reformatting) without the written permission of the Chief Executive of Age Concern New Zealand.