

## Key trends

from data about elder abuse and neglect in New Zealand

Each year, Age Concern's Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention (EANP) services receive over 1000 referrals about people who may be facing elder abuse or neglect. That's about **4 referrals every working day**.

We investigate each situation, and work with the older person/kaumātua (and their family/whānau when this is appropriate) to help them to live safely, free from abuse. About two-thirds of these situations are confirmed to involve 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.<sup>6</sup>*

Abuse is also identified by other agencies including health providers, the Police, lawyers, other community support organisations, and other non-Age Concern Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention services.

That's not the whole size of the problem though. We know that only a small proportion of elder abuse incidents come to the attention of an agency that can be of assistance.<sup>7</sup>

A large community based study in the UK reported that 2.6% of older people experience abuse each year.<sup>8</sup> This is equivalent to **2 older people in New Zealand being abused every hour of every day**.

## Types of abuse

Most older people/kaumātua experience more than one type of abuse or neglect. The types of abuse identified in cases referred to Age Concern are:

- Psychological 62%

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation. (2002). *Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse*. Geneva: WHO

<sup>7</sup> National Center on Elder Abuse USA, *Iceberg Theory of Elder Abuse: The National Elder Abuse Incidence Study*, 1998

<sup>8</sup> National Centre for Social Research, King's College London, *UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People: Prevalence Survey Report*, 2007

- Material/financial - 50%
- Physical – 20%
- Neglect – 20%

## Who is involved?

- **2/3 of abused older people are women.** Even taking account of the fact that there are 6 women over the age of 65 for every 5 men, women are over-represented as victims of elder abuse.
- **40% of abused live alone**
- **Almost 80% of abuse is committed by family/whānau members;** and we know that family/whānau members continue to abuse their older relatives even when that person is in residential care.
- **Over 40% of abusers are adult children**
- Unlike other forms of family/whānau violence, **abusers are as likely to be female as male.**
- **Up to 35 % of abusers are primary caregivers.** This could be a family/whānau member or support worker if the person is living in the community, or a staff member if the person is living in residential care.

## How does abuse affect older people/kaumātua?

Older people/kaumātua who are dependent on others are particularly vulnerable to abuse. There are a number of reasons for this - abuse often happens because of an imbalance of power. It continues to happen because the older person/kaumātua may fear that if they complain, they abuse will worsen.

For **about half** of the older people/kaumātua supported by Age Concern over the last ten years, their **health was significantly affected** by the abuse they experienced.

Two out of every 5 abused people experienced a **significant reduction in their independence, loss of confidence and self esteem, and reported feeling very frightened or anxious and emotionally distressed.**

About a quarter experienced **long-term consequences.** The UK study found similar results.

For more information about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day  
and contact details for services visit:

**[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)**

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