



Findings from the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study

Australian Institute of Family Studies

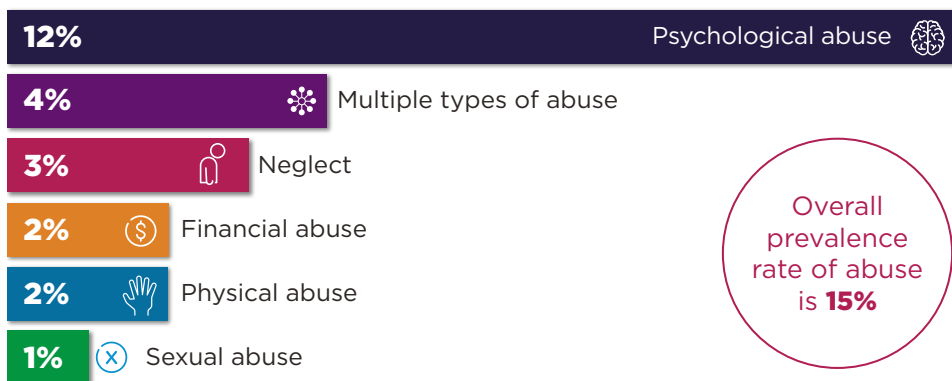
June 2024



This fact sheet discusses elder abuse and presents material that some people may find distressing. If you or someone you know needs assistance, please call 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374). A list of elder abuse support services is available [at the end of this snapshot](#). If you are in immediate danger call Police on 000.

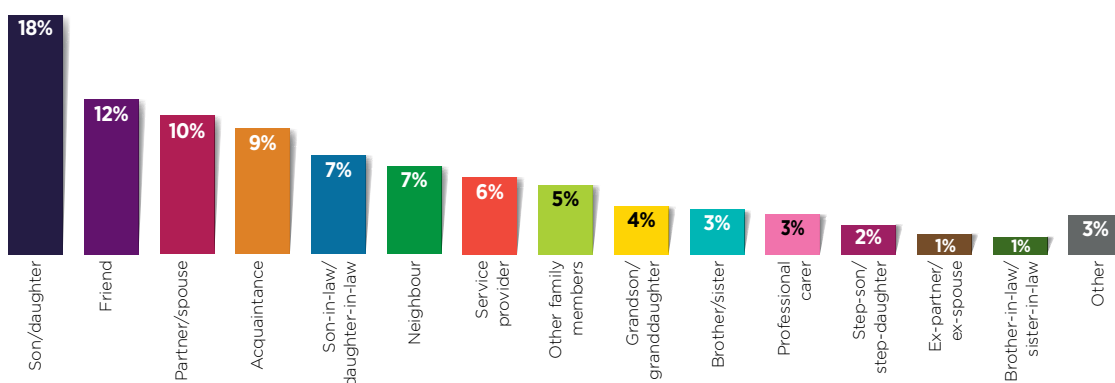
The problem of the abuse and mistreatment of older people has gained significant attention in Australia in recent years and increased policy focus. In 2020, as part of the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians, the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to undertake the most extensive empirical examination of elder abuse in Australia to date - the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (NEAPS). For World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, this piece highlights some of the major findings from the NEAPS Survey of Older People.

Data collected from a nationally representative sample of 7,000 community-dwelling older Australians (65 years+) showed that around 1 in 6 older Australians (14.8%) reported experiencing a form of abuse. The elder abuse took many forms, including psychological abuse (12%), neglect (3%), financial abuse (2%), physical abuse (2%) and sexual abuse (1%). Almost a quarter of older Australians who had experienced abuse reported experiencing multiple types of abuse.

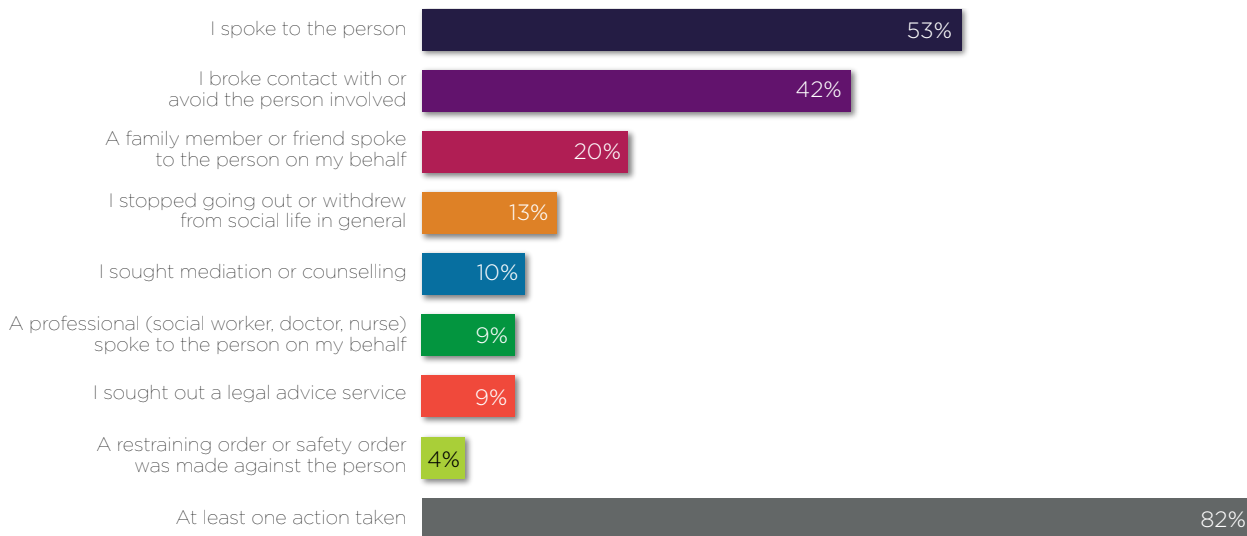


Older Australians aged 65-69 years were most at risk of experiencing elder abuse and those aged 80 years+ were at increased risk of experiencing neglect. Other risk factors included being of lower socio-economic status, being single, separated or divorced, living in rented housing or owning a house with a debt against it, being in poor physical or psychological health and having higher levels of social isolation.

Many older Australians have increased dependency on those within their social community. However, elder abuse is frequently perpetrated by members of their family and close community, challenging our assumptions about relationships. For example, results revealed people engaging abuse and mistreatment were mostly adult children (18%), comprising the largest group of people engaging in abuse and mistreatment for all types of elder abuse (with the exception of sexual abuse). Other groups engaging in abuse and mistreatment included friends (12%), their partner/spouse (10%) and acquaintances (9%). Service providers were identified within the main perpetrator groups for neglect.



NEAPS included important insights into the help-seeking behaviours of older adults who had experienced elder abuse. Only just over a third of older adults who experienced abuse sought help or advice from informal or formal sources of support. Whether they sought help or not, 8 in 10 participants reported taking action to stop the abuse. This included speaking directly with the person undertaking the abuse or mistreatment (53%) or breaking and/or avoiding contact with them (42%).



These results are concerning as such actions may exacerbate abuse by increasing the older person’s social isolation. Additionally, they do not safeguard older people against further abuse nor do they result in consequences for the people engaging in the abuse and neglect of older people.

Importantly, any mental and/or physical health concerns caused by the abuse are unaddressed. Survey results found those who had experienced elder abuse were approximately 3 times more likely to have probable serious mental illness compared with those who did not experience abuse or mistreatment. Research has also linked elder abuse to adverse health outcomes, morbidity and mortality.¹

1 Dong, X. et al. (2009). Elder self-neglect and abuse and mortality risk in a community-dwelling population. *JAMA*, 302(5), 517-526.

Establishing adequate and accurate information about the abuse and mistreatment of older people is a central component of preventing it. Understanding the frequency influences how seriously the problem is taken and encourages monitoring to determine if it is being resolved. This is why it is imperative to continue to understand its prevalence within Australia, especially for populations whose risks are yet to be adequately explored, such as older Australians of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, who are culturally or linguistically diverse, experiencing cognitive decline, residing in residential aged care settings, and who are LGBTIQ+.

Support services/Helplines

- If you have any concerns about potential or actual elder abuse, please contact 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) to be redirected to the existing phone line service in your state or territory (free call).
- If you or someone you know have experienced violence or sexual assault and require immediate or ongoing assistance, contact 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) to talk to a counsellor from the National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline.
- For confidential support and information, contact Safe Steps' 24/7 family violence response line on 1800 015 188 or the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491.
- For a confidential discussion with an experienced counsellor, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

The full report on the NEAPS is available on the [AIFS website](#).

© Commonwealth of Australia 2024. With the exception of AIFS branding, the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, content provided by third parties, and any material protected by a trademark. All textual material presented in this publication is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence ([CC BY 4.0](#)). You may copy, distribute and build upon this work for commercial and non-commercial purposes; however, you must attribute the Commonwealth of Australia as the copyright holder of the work. Content that is copyrighted by a third party is subject to the licensing arrangements of the original owner.



Australian Government
**Australian Institute of
Family Studies**

Discovering what
works for families