

**Seniors Bullying: Recognize, Prevent, Intervene**

**The Canadian Institute of Workplace Bullying and Harassment Resources Inc.**

Founder, Linda Crockett MSW, RSW, SEP, CPPA  
Co-Facilitator Nolan Crouse MBA

Presenting to **CORE Alberta: Healthy Aging Alberta**

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Linda Crockett MSW, RSW, SEP, CPPA  
Founder, Facilitator, Consultant, Coach, and Therapist.



**Workplace bullying can't exist where it isn't tolerated.**



Nolan Crouse MBA  
Facilitator, Consultant, Trainer

Promoting Psychological Safety in the Workplace

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**Topics Covered in this Overview Workshop**

**Promoting Psychological Safety for Adults of All Ages!**




**Prevention, Intervention, Restore/Repair**

- Define Seniors Bullying (Peer vs Peer, Family vs Senior, Staff vs Senior)
- Toxic Tactics, Causes, Prevalence, & Risks, Characteristics, Causes
- Impact on individuals, Families, Helping Professionals
- Extend of the Problem and What to do - reporting, documenting, managing reactions
- Potential Interventions

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**ALARMING FACTS**

**ELDER ABUSE** can be a single or repeated act (WHO)  
**Bullying** is always a repeated act, *Linda Crockett*



*in 6 people 60 years of age or older* have experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the last year.

**2 Billion People** will be 60 and older in 2050, an increase of 900 million in 2015.

Only 4% of Elder Abuse is reported.

Rates of Elder Abuse have Increased during COVID.

Elder Abuse Resource: World Health Organization

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**Adult Bullying is Complex**

Adults expect to be safe amongst mature, educated, peers, friends, neighbours, or caregivers.

Adults are expected to know and respect the human rights of others.

Caregivers are expected to know and respect the human rights of seniors.

Yet ...

Seniors bullying has reached an alarming rate!

And...

COVID has heightened many risk factors!

Under Researched  
 Under Recognized  
 Under Addressed




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**Age is a protected ground under the Alberta Human Rights Commission.** Age 18 and up!



**You are protected against discrimination, bullying and harassment!**

**Elder Abuse: is any action or inaction, by self or others, that jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older adult.**

"any intentional or reckless act or willful and negligent disregard, occurring within a relationship of family, trust or dependency" directed at someone 65 years of age or older which causes physical, emotional or psychological harm, involves the misappropriation or misuse of money or other personal possessions or personal or real property, subjects an individual to non-consensual sexual contact, activity or behaviour, or fails to provide the necessities of life.



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**Federal and Provincial Legislation**

**You are protected against discrimination, bullying and harassment!**

**Federal**

**Every Canadian has the right to live and work in a healthy, respectful and safe environment.** The government of Canada is committed to ensuring that all federally regulated workplaces, including the public service, are free from harassment and violence of any kind," says Jean-Yves Duclos, president of the Treasury Board of Canada.

<https://www.hrreporter.com/employment-law/news/bill-c-65-to-take-effect-jan-1-2021/330862>

**Bill C-65** defines harassment and violence as any action, conduct or comment, including of a sexual nature, which can reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or other physical or psychological injury or illness to an employee, including any prescribed action, conduct or comment.

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**Defining**

Seniors Bullying

Psychological Harassment

Psychological Violence

**Bullying Defined by Linda Crockett**

1. Harassment, discrimination, and racism, **can be a one-time incident.**
1. Psychological harassment (bullying), **occurs over a period of time.**
2. It is a **variety of negative actions and/or behaviours**, which are intended (whether consciously or unconsciously), ...
3. to **cause some form of harm** to another person, or group of people.

- Bullying is an abuse of power and power comes in many forms.
- Often occurring behind closed doors, difficult to prove.
- It is complex and required trauma informed skills to address.

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**Tactics**

Gossip, humiliation, embarrassing or isolating, the targeted senior(s)	Telling lies, undermining – relationship sabotage	Verbal aggression: yelling, calling names, making verbal threats, using inappropriate jokes, or offensive teasing
Staring, glaring, rolling the eyes, huffing and puffing, and/or refusing to speak when the targeted senior is around.	Unjustified criticism: pretending to be one's friend.	Name calling offending a person's characteristics or habits
Trivial fault finding or mocking them: causing embarrassment	Using personal information to humiliate someone.	Breaking Confidence, sharing personal information.

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Seniors bullying seniors shows us that immaturity has no age limit. Call toll free 310-1818 for help

What if there is no family to step in and help a bullied senior?

What if caregivers or contracted resources don't listen, don't believe her/him, or don't know what to do?

What if they are too ashamed to talk about it?

What if she/he is physically dependent and cannot leave?

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**Unintentional Enabling, Errors, and the resulting additional injuries**

Families and staff are not sufficiently trained to prevent, intervene, or help repair the harm caused by bullying

There is a lack of awareness and the skill sets needed for identifying and resolving the complexities of senior bullying.

Often a lack of current policies and procedures.

Prevention, Intervention, and Repair Options

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**Poll Question #1**

Have you, or someone you know, experienced adult bullying?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

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### Seniors Experiences of Bullying

First, Who is Bullying Them?  
Steps to address the abuse will vary depending on who is doing it!

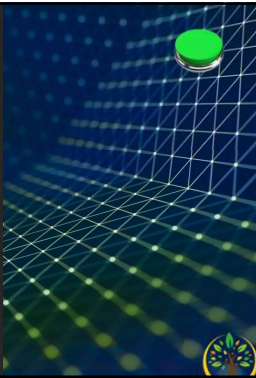
Peer to Peer?

Family Members?

Hired Care Providers?

Community Members and/or social groups?

A Mix of the Above?  
Mobbing? Or Separate Cases?



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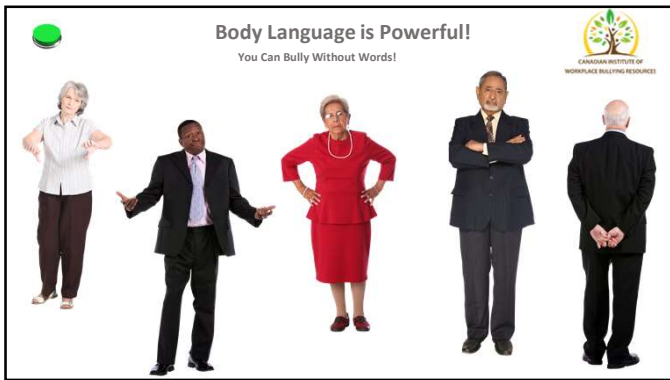

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### Body Language is Powerful!

You Can Bully Without Words!

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### Campaign of Psychological Violence, Or Gaslighting



- Giving false information or direction and then denying it.
- Making derogatory, intimidating, comments and threats, and denying it.
- Their actions do not match their words i.e.: charming one moment, rageful or bitter the next. Unpredictable. Keeping target confused.
- Attempts to have others align with them. Make others believe the target is the problem i.e., mentally unstable, or incompetent
- Everyone else is to blame, everyone else is a liar.

Wearing people down - over time - with all of the above.



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 **More on what is not bullying .....**

**Out of Character:** outbursts

**Life Crisis:** such as loss, illness, divorce, financial distress or bankruptcy.



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**Where and When do Seniors Bully?**

 **Bullying is observed during :**

congregate meals  
bingo games, friendship centers, bowling, community events  
a need to share space, seats, and resources

 **“Cliquish behavior may be found in small groups of residents who lay claim to certain spaces or territories in the building to feel a sense of belonging at the expense of others who may feel excluded.”**

*Bernstein, MEd, director of resident services at Winn Companies in Boston.*

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**Why are they being bullied?  
What are the added complexities?**

Vulnerable due to physical limitations and some level of dependency	May suffer from a mental health condition: anxiety, ADHD, depression	In midst of grieving a significant loss, feeling alone, sad, and lost.
May be new to the area and feeling unsettled, insecure, vulnerable, lost unfamiliar, alone.	Various stages of Dementia, Alzheimer's, or other.	May be from another country, English is not their first language.
Hearing Impaired One is too loud. One is not loud enough.	One may be popular, overbearing, dominating, and prefer attention. The other shy, introverted, and wishes to be left alone.	

**Bullied in the past and/or other unhealed trauma?**



18

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Sharing a few stories offer examples of seniors bullying.

**Nolan**



Domination  
Shaming  
Humiliating  
Isolating





**Linda**



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COVID




Missing Family Members  
Missing Important Moments in their Lives



Restrictions on Contact

COVID INCREASED

THE RISK FACTORS FOR BULLYING

Stress, Pressure, Exhaustion  
Uncertainty, Confusion, Lost Safety  
Isolation, Segregation, Separation  
Loneliness, Aloneness  
Conflicts, Disagreements, Arguments  
Fear, Anxiety, Panic  
Grief, Loss, Sadness,  
Depression, PTSD,  
Medical Trauma  
Illness, Pain, Suffering  
Significant changes lacking  
support and resources.



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What's the Difference?  
Sometimes it is a fine line!

Elder Abuse	Senior Bullying	Challenging Behaviours
<p>Adult child takes Grampa's food away from him until he gives his grandson his opiate pain medication.</p> <p>Caregiver leaves her client sitting in urine until she agrees to keep her drinking on the job, a secret.</p>  <p>Family stealing money from the senior</p>	<p>Grampa refuses to leave his home because, his neighbor calls him names, and makes fun of him.</p> <p>Seniors gathering to watch shows or sports at a friendship Center. Two dominating seniors hide the remote on the other seniors so that no one can control the volume or change the channel. They choose the shows, they choose the volume.</p> <p>Every time a senior lady enters the room, two other seniors call her names like, whore, tramp, cheap, because she is friends with one of the male seniors.</p>	<p>Dominating, overbearing personalities. Tend to bully newcomers. Tend to recruit others to help them bully others.</p> <p><b>Varying Beliefs, Values, Rituals</b> Some wish to pray before a meal. Some do not.</p> <p><b>Outburst by seniors</b> suffering from an intellectual disability. Including behaviours of aggression, anger, false accusations.</p> <p><b>Hearing Aids</b> One willing to wear hearing devices and others are not. They begin yelling at each other because one is too loud, and the other cannot hear.</p>

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**Elder Abuse is any action or inaction by a person(s) in a trusting relationship that jeopardizes the health or well being of an older adult causing harm or distress. Elder abuse can take several forms including...**

**Physical Abuse** is the use of physical force causing discomfort, which may or may not result in bodily injury, rough handling, physical pain, or impairment.

**Psychological & Emotional Abuse** diminishes the identify and self-worth of older adults. It can also provoke intense fear, anxiety, or debilitating stress.

**Financial Abuse** is the misuse of an older adult's funds or property through fraud, trickery, theft or force. Can be difficult to detect because it often occurs over a period of time.

**Sexual Abuse** is any unwanted form of sexual activity, behavior, assault, or harassment of an older person.

**Spiritual Abuse** is any act of denying or forcing or ridiculing religious or spiritual beliefs or participation in religious services.

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**Poll Question # 2**

Of those who said YES to knowing an adult who was bullied, how many were seniors?

- a) 1- 5 people
- b) 6- 10 people
- c) More?

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**Profile of a Bully or Harasser**

*They exist in all ages, cultures, and all forms of employment.*




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**Why do Seniors Bully?**

- Mental Health Diagnosis e.g., borderline personality disorder, bi-polar, schizophrenia, PTSD, anxiety, addictions, or alcoholism.  
They may have suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)  
They may have Dementia, Alzheimer's, or other conditions e.g., chronic pain.
- They may have gotten away with their dominating, and/or overbearing, and/or controlling behaviours most of their life. They might have been rewarded for this behaviour in some way e.g., promotions, bonuses at work.  
Typically lack self insight, self monitoring, emotional regulation, or emotional intelligence.
- May have experienced trauma in their life. Never sought help e.g., bullied as a child, or at work. May have grown up in a chaotic household. May have cumulative PTSD.  
Are typically insecure, low self esteem, fear loss of control, may suffer from imposter syndrome.  
May be grieving a loss of a loved one, loss of youth, loss of health, loss of freedom.

Happy – Healthy - People Do Not Bully

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**People who are Hurting Hurt other People**



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**Barriers to Reporting**



*Witnesses Need Support Too*

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## Bystanders

**Options**

- Advise the targeted senior that you have noticed what is happening. **Validate** that this is unacceptable and against company policy.
- You don't have to see a crisis to **validate** that someone is "going through a rough time".
- Make sure you make promises you can keep.
- If the senior is fearful, stay with them until support arrives.

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### What is Not Bullying?

- People tend to disagree, have different opinions, not get along.... and some tend not to like each other
- Expression of conflicting opinions
- Direct communication
- Corrective feedback
- Mutually tease / joking with each other

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**The Impact of Bullying**



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### Impact on the Mind and Body

**Psychological Impact**

- Disturbed Sleep
- Anxiety/Panic
- Vulnerable & Isolate
- Depression
- Low Self Esteem
- Low Self Worth
- High Self Doubt
- Fear and Confusion
- Lack Trust/Safety
- Paranoid
- Loss of Self, Self Trust
- Obsess/Ruminate
- PTSD



**Physical Impact**


- Fatigue
- Loss of focus, memory, concentration
- Gastro Problems that become disorders.
- Cardiac problems that become disorders.
- Loss of appetite.
- Low Immune
- Migraines
- TMJ
- Body Pain

**The Impact Can be Fatal**

**Costs Millions!**

- Suicidal Ideation
- Completed Suicides
- Death by:
  - Heart Attack or Stroke,
  - Homicides

**We Must End Bullying for all Ages!**



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### Neurological Impact

**Cognitive Functioning can be impacted:**

- Memory
- Focus
- Concentration
- Retaining information
- Decision making
- Behaviors
- Reactions
- inaction.


Normal Brain    Bullied Brain    PTSD Brain



CBS 11 - Todd Clements - Clements Clinic - PTSD and Bullying

cbstttv.com

<https://neurosciencenews.com/brain-bullying-1033/>



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## Poll Question # 3

If you witnessed or experienced adult bullying, did you report it?

- a) Yes
- b) No



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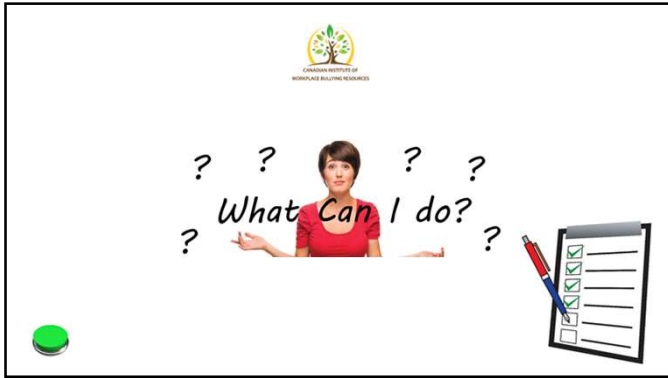
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**Know your Legal Rights!  
Understand Policies/Procedures**

**Family Systems, Community Systems,  
and Caregiver Service**

These are guidelines on...

- How you need to treat others and how others need to treat you.
- Inform Seniors of their rights and options.



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**More Steps to  
Prevent and Intervene**

**Establish clear guidelines and policies** to address bullying behaviours in your facility, organization, with home care providers, and during community gatherings.

**Teach de-escalation and basic trauma informed support strategies** to staff, volunteers, family members, community members, residents, and all other participants. Including bystander intervention workshops and/or assertiveness training. Role playing interventions is very helpful!

**Offer movies or documentaries** on this topic and then have facilitated discussions following. Ensure supports are available in case anyone is triggered e.g., arrange for a bullying specialist to be there. Increase awareness, invite discussions, have guests come and speak during lunches or tea times.

**Create a welcoming, inviting atmosphere, have posters re: kindness and respect**, be sure to watch for those who are alone and may need gentle encouragement.

**Offer options for reporting any abuse.**

- > A confidential exploration discussion, include the option to use an outside resources if that feels safer.
- > Alternate reporting person – just in case they are not feeling comfortable with the first option.
- > Updated handout with relevant resources.
- > Be sure resources are qualified & experienced in this area.

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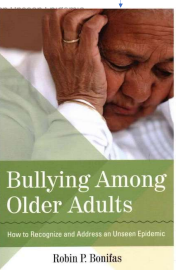
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Policy example taken from this excellent book and resource!



### Bullying Policy Statement

Child communication is an important part of creating a comfortable living environment for all those responsible involved. The responsibility that requires this time been well on his or her part to make others feel better to order to accomplish this, beyond one of the following behaviors will be helpful:

- **Intimidation:**
  - blocking progress
  - spreading rumors
  - offering encouragement
- **Being Inclusive:**
  - being approachable
  - welcoming others
  - saying "please" and "thank you"

At the same time, being a concerned environment can be difficult and we can sometimes feel unsure with our children. If anyone is threatened or upset to your behavior in a residential and safe setting with shared areas of supervised maintenance with these behaviors, you:

In helping to create a child community, please avoid engaging in the following negative behaviors:

- **Childhood gaming:**
  - uninvited social events
  - uninvited, unannounced visits, making derogatory remarks
  - excluding or attempting to exclude other visitors from activities assigned for recreation
  - using water or tables during meals, activities, or special events
- **Using offensive gestures or words when spoken (verbal or written) body language toward others, such as pointing**
- **making verbal threats to harm others**
- **staring**
- **staring at property**
- **staring at children**
- **staring at any form of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse**
- **staring or threatening to harm others**

If you witness or experience any of the above behaviors, please inform (report appropriate individuals involved, who will keep your report confidential and help to resolve the problem).

Because we are serious about creating a safe and comfortable living environment for everyone, engaged in any of the above negative behaviors will result in the following actions: all 1st offenders will receive warnings; all 2nd offenders verbal and written warnings; all 3rd offenders verbal and written warnings; all 4th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 5th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 6th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 7th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 8th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 9th offenders verbal and written warnings; all 10th offenders verbal and written warnings.

Thank you to everyone for consistently working to create a child and caring environment that all (invested organizations) love. Let's work together for a positive tomorrow!

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### Assess and Address Seniors Bullying

**First:** take steps to support those who may be harmed.

**Ensure Safety First**

- Always ensure safety. Do not force someone to talk to the person they fear.
- Validate that this was not their fault, they have support.
- Advise the assigned legal caregivers.
- Determine if they require medical or psychological support.

**Complete**

- Complete a Bullying Risk Assessment.
- Complete an Incident Report.
  - ✓ We offer templates

**Follow**

- Follow legislation, policies and procedures, and ensure you are adequately trained in this area.
- Awareness, knowledge of resources, and a variety of skills sets are needed to intervene and prevent further harm.

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continued...

### Assess and Address

**Take steps to address those who are doing the harming!**

**Each Case is Unique - So Are the Solutions!**

- Determine most appropriate steps for this individual or case.
- Contact a safe and assigned medical support person or family member. Transparency is important.
- Assess for causes, triggers (e.g., medical concerns, and safety)
- Schedule a meeting: medical, caregiver, family for solutions.
- Assign a support person to supervise until the above concerns have been addressed.

**With the Cause, Triggers, or Conditions Determined**

- Medications may need to be adjusted.
- Locations may need to be changed, and/or triggers addressed or removed.
- Supervision may need to be temporarily or permanently increased.
- A review of boundaries, rules, expectations, policies and procedures may be helpful.
- A facilitated discussion with a qualified professional (e.g., counselling can help).
- Caregiver may need additional training or support: empathy training, or support group for caregivers.

**Avoid**

- Avoid favoritism, making excuses, or ignoring minor incidences – these are early warning signs!
- Address each appropriately. Reminders, events, and explanations re: kindness and respect
- Don't avoid conflict! You will just make it worse if you do. Problem's fester and grow!

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### Please Document

- Even if you do not plan to make a complaint, **keep a record** of what you have witnessed. Things may change, you may need this.
- Consider making a complaint. Nothing changes unless you do.
- If you are bystander and struggling with your situation and options, **you need support too**. Have a confidential discussion with a professional experienced in this area.

Credibility  
 Accountability



**Facts:** date, time, location, names, what happened including words said, behaviours, actions taken, and results.

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### Helpful Books to Deal with Seniors Bullying, Conflicts, Difficult Conversations











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### Further Training: Steps to Consider

Trauma Informed

**When an Employee Makes a Complaint  
Never Force them to Confront the Respondent**

**What to do if you are accused of bullying.  
Whether Valid or False!**

**Be aware of when to disengage**

**How to Manage the Damage:  
harm, injuries, repair, restore, and the recovery  
part of this phenomenon!**

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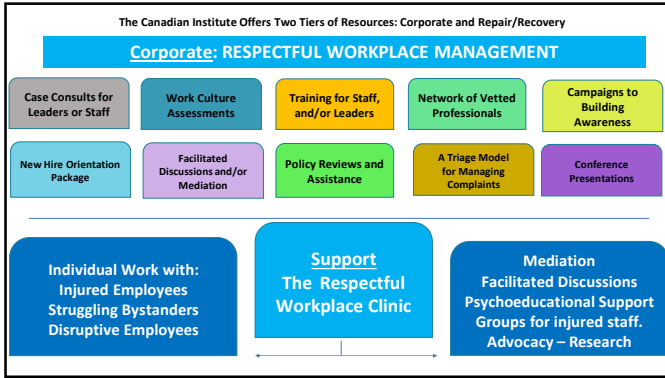
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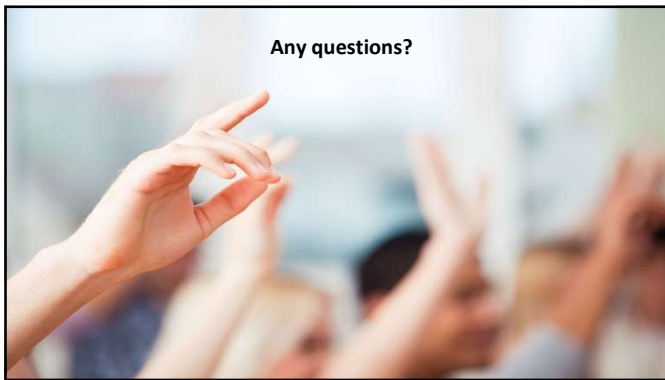
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**Resource Links and Research**

<https://online.utpb.edu/about-us/articles/communication/how-much-of-communication-is-nonverbal/>

<https://www.hrreporter.com/employment-law/news/bill-c-65-to-take-effect-jan-1-2021/330862>

[https://www.hpcoc.ca/elder\\_abuse\\_in\\_canada/](https://www.hpcoc.ca/elder_abuse_in_canada/)

[https://www.thelawyersdaily.ca/insurance/articles/5901?utm\\_source=shared-articles&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=shared-articles](https://www.thelawyersdaily.ca/insurance/articles/5901?utm_source=shared-articles&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=shared-articles)

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jq/fv-vf/elder-aines/def/p22.html>

<https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/services/Pages/age.aspx>

<http://elderadvocates.ca/>      <https://www.cnpea.ca/en/>      <https://www.cnpea.ca/en/resources/government-strategies>

Brozowski, K., & Hall, D. R. (2010). Aging and risk: physical and sexual abuse of elders in Canada. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25*(7), 1183-1199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260509340546>

Dong, X., Chen R., Change, E.S. Simon (2013) Elder Abuse and Psychological Well Being: A Systematic Review and Implications for Research and Policy *Gerontology 2013,59:132-142* <https://doi.org/10.1159/000341652>

Mlyncz, J., Sigafoos, S., Malmgren, W., Ostaszkiewicz, J., & Najberg, S. (2020). Elder abuse and neglect: an overlooked patient safety issue. A focus group study of nursing home leaders' perceptions of elder abuse and neglect. *BMC health services research, 20*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-00271-4>

Suzanne, L. (2020). Police-reported family violence against seniors in Canada. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020002/article/00101/01-eng.htm>

Pleuren, N., Depla, M. F., Janssen, D. J., Huismans, M., & Hertogh, C. M. (2020). Underlying goals of advance care planning (ACP): a qualitative analysis of the literature. *BMC palliative care, 19*(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-020-01913-1>

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### A Court Case and Stats on Crime

<https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-td/cv/21/03/2021BCCA0377.htm>

The daughter took the position that her mother suffered from severe dementia, and that she lacked capacity to make decisions regarding her financial affairs and was subject to undue influence by her other daughter. The mother retained her own lawyer and applied to strike the action which was brought in her name by her daughter (and to remove her daughter as litigation guardian). The Court was satisfied that a less extensive assessment of the mother was adequate. It is an invasion of an individual's rights to require them to undergo a mental capacity assessment, and the court should not make such an order without sufficient evidentiary basis for doing so. In this case, the mother had obtained an assessment to address the Court's concern about capacity and requiring her to undergo a further mental capacity assessment would not be appropriate. The daughter appealed the result. The appeal has not yet been heard. However, pending the appeal the daughter applied for a stay of proceedings - an order that nothing happen in the underlying litigation until the appeal has been heard. The Court of Appeal dismissed the application for a stay of proceedings. The reasons can be found here: <https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-td/cv/21/03/2021BCCA0377.htm>

- Each year, about 10 percent of Canadian seniors are victims of crime. The vast majority of these are property crimes.
- Up to one percent of Canadian seniors experience violent crimes or physical abuse.
- About 4 - 5 percent of seniors report experiencing some form of abuse from the age of 65 on.
- Financial abuse/exploitation and emotional abuse appear to be the most prevalent forms of abuse.
- The overall prevalence of elder abuse in Canada is similar to the levels found in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.
- Seniors are less likely to report being victims of crime or spousal abuse than are non-seniors.
- Many crimes against seniors are not reported to police but are reported to health professionals, community groups, and financial institutions/agencies.
- Senior victims of violence usually know their attackers, who are equally as likely to be family members as friends or acquaintances.
- Males report more incidents of violence than do females. While men report more violence at the hands of acquaintances and strangers, women report more family-related incidents.
- Seniors at more advanced ages report lower rates of violence than do younger seniors.
- Less than 10 percent of senior victims of violence suffer significant injuries.
- Physical force, rather than weapons, are most often used in violent attacks on seniors.
- The perpetrators of violent acts against seniors are usually males and tend, on average, to be older than those who commit these acts against younger people.
- Seniors were more likely than non-seniors to stay home due to the fear of crime, whereas non-seniors were more likely to alter their behaviour in some other way in order to protect themselves (e.g., to take self-defence courses).

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*Linda Crockett*



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