world elder abuse awareness day

factsheet 5

Why Does Abuse Happen in Later Life?

Abuse and neglect of older adults is a complex area. The many forms of abuse and neglect are not acceptable; some forms are against the law. There is no one simple explanation for why abuse or neglect occurs.

Some situations involve spouses; some involve adult children or grandchildren or other relatives. Others involve paid caregivers or family members who are giving care.

Some abuse and neglect may —

- reflect ageism,
- be part of a cycle of family violence, or
- be opportunistic behaviour.

Abuse and neglect may also reflect a lack of understanding and knowledge about older adults and aging. Stereotypes and misconceptions about aging and older people may lead to ageist attitudes that older adults are not deserving of respect.

Some people use violence and control in their relationships with other people. Some people have negative beliefs about older people, while others do not treat older adults with respect. Some people incorrectly feel they are entitled to an older adult's property, simply because the person is old, or because they are helping the older adult, or because of their position in the family.

Some people experience personal problems or stresses that may increase their risk of harming or neglecting others. Some simply become overwhelmed or do not know more positive ways of relating. Limited financial resources may create family tensions that may lead to abuse or neglect.

It does not matter who the abuser is, or why the person is abusing an older adult. No one deserves to be abused or mistreated.

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