

## Abuse of Older People Risk Factors and the Effect of Abuse

The Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc. (ARAS) advocates for older people whose rights and entitlements are at risk. ARAS has four programs: residential aged care, community care, abuse prevention and Aboriginal advocacy.

The ARAS Abuse Prevention Program (APP) assists older people who are at risk of, or experiencing abuse from those with whom they are in a relationship of trust such as family or friends. Abuse may include one or more of the following forms: financial, psychological, physical, sexual, social and/or neglect.

Awareness of the risk factors that can contribute to the abuse of older people may assist individuals to consider safeguards to maintain control over their lives. The risk factors may involve one or more of the following:

**Family conflict/dynamics** - This includes a history of family violence, conflict between siblings, changing dynamics as older people become frail and there is a shift in their role within the family.

**Dependency** - Can involve either the older person or the alleged abuser, or be mutual. These dependencies can be physical, psychological, emotional or financial, for example:

- The older person may have a dementing illness with greater reliance on others for making decisions about their care and financial affairs.
- The older person may rely on the alleged abuser for transport or social contact; the alleged abuser may rely on the older person for accommodation, money.
- The older person may be dependent physically or emotionally on the alleged abuser and feel very distressed that their son/daughter is mistreating them.

**Isolation** - This can include geographical isolation and/or being restricted socially due to physical disability or frailty.

- Older people who maintain a connection with their community, appear to have a decreased risk of being abused.
- In rural or remote areas, local support and resources may be limited and people may be reluctant to discuss personal issues with service providers living in the same community.



**Alcohol and substance abuse** - This may be a pattern of dependency for either the older person or the alleged abuser and can influence the ability to make decisions, protect themselves or stop abusive behaviour.

- The older person may need to be supervised when taking medications so that incorrect dosage or the wrong medication is not consumed.
- For the alleged abuser, dependency on drugs and/or alcohol may cause inappropriate or violent behaviour.

### **The Effects of an Abusive Situation on the Older Person**

Older people may be reluctant to admit that they are experiencing mistreatment of any kind, particularly from a close family member. They can experience shame and disbelief and keep hoping that the abuse will stop.

Older people may be reluctant to confide in anyone due to fear of retribution not only from alleged abuser but also from other family members.

Older people may want to protect the alleged abuser from getting into trouble. This may occur when the abuser has a mental illness or other disability.

It is important for older people to know that abuse is not OK and that they should talk to someone about it. What finally prompts an older person to approach ARAS, is the realisation that if they do not seek help, their circumstances may not change. If necessary, ARAS advocates can travel to regional areas to assist a consumer.

### **Further Information**

ARAS is a free, statewide, confidential, independent service.

For more information or support to protect and uphold your rights please contact ARAS:

**45 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000**

Telephone **8232 5377** or

**1800 700 600** freecall for country callers

Email **aras@agedrights.asn.au**

Website **www.sa.agedrights.asn.au**

or **www.elderabuse.org.au**