

**Advocacy**

**Problem-Based Learning Case #3:  
Older adult abuse hotline**

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Submitted to  
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**PBL Case #3 - Older adult abuse hotline:** "Older Adult abuse takes many forms including physical, psychological, and financial, perpetrated by family members and paid caregivers. There is a lack of awareness among older adults themselves as well as the general public that this is a serious issue in our province. Other hotlines exist (e.g. farm stress hotline, gambling hotline) but the provincial government says there's no money. We must discern how to facilitate the development of a province-wide mechanism(s) for this problem." (This assignment was co-created by Gloria, Holly and the SSM Issues Committee during the Fall of 2017.)

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## Elder Abuse Hotline

Every Older Canadian has the right to be live free from the fear of abuse yet abuse against elders is becoming more common. 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 ([en.m.Wikipedia.org](https://en.m.wikipedia.org)). Elder Abuse can include physical and sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation, emotional, Spiritual, institutional and psychological abuse, economic and financial exploitation, neglect (self or by others), and a violation of rights.

Elder abuse often occurs because of the abuser's power and control over the older person. Abuse can happen when the aggressor wants to intimidate, isolate, dominate or control another person. Elder Abuse be intentional or unintentional abuse. Those who take over the role of guardianship to their parents for example may believe that by having their parent move in with them which may involve having the elder relocate is helping their parent out, but, in can cause more harm than good. Even though, the family of the elder parent believes their trying to help, having the elder person relocate is harming them by either not allowing the elder person the make those decisions for themselves, or by pulling them away from their friends and the life that is familiar to them, causing more damage, even if the family member are not aware of the damages that they are causing themselves.

Elder Abuse first appeared on the national scenes in the 1970s. However, the formal efforts to help vulnerable elders began two decades before that time ([nap.edu](https://nap.edu)). Unfortunately, elders have been mistreated throughout history. Ancient Greeks believed that older people, especially parents, simply needed to die—sometimes quite violently—to ensure that civilization continued (Pamela, T. Tester - A glass half full article). Elder abuse is rarely mentioned in the American

literature of the late-19th and early 20th centuries, because, according to Stearns, elders were of little interest. However, in the early 1960s, because of heightened interest in the rights of disenfranchised populations (e.g., women, older people, minorities), issues of elder abuse rose in importance and have continued to do so in recent years.

The United States since that time have brought in amendments and protection acts, that protect Elderly persons not just against the physical abuse many experience, but those who also experience financial exploitation either from their own family members, friends or those who have taken guardianship of their parent, or elder relatives. In Canada however, the province of Saskatchewan has not been keeping up with the demands of providing elder abuse services. When it comes to critical hotlines that provide aid and resources in times of abusive situations, our province seems to offer some relief in other aspects such as, child abuse, crisis intervention, and even hotlines dealing with domestic violence, that focuses on the abuse that happens within a family unit, but also between partners. The province of Saskatchewan, does not currently have any elder abuse hotlines set in place. Although a helpline does not necessarily provide a true reflection of such situations as it is based upon the physical and mental ability of people to utilize such a resource.

### **Statistics**

There has been found to be a correlation between the increasing senior population that has risen over the past decades, and the increase in elder abuse cases that have being reported. Approximately 4% of elders (98000) in Canadian private dwellings reported been abused. Financial abuse is the most prevalent type of abuse affecting 60,000 Canadian elders, whereas Chronic verbal aggression affects approximately 34,000 elderly Canadians. More than 18,000 elderly persons in Canada are subjected to more than one type of abuse. Female victims of abuse

outnumber male victims by 5:3. In addition 12,000 seniors in Canada experience physical abuse (transitionhouse.ca). “In 2007, Statistics Canada reported that the overall rate of police-reported violence against seniors increased by 20 per cent between 1998 and 2005” ( quote from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/Canada/elder-abuse-a-growing-dilemma-among-an-aging-population-1.1050233>). According to the AEA helpline in the UK, abuse occurs primarily in the home (67%), followed by residential care (23%), and than hospitals (5%).

Researchers may have difficulty obtaining accurate elder abuse statistics for the following reasons; Elder abuse is largely hidden problem and tends to be committed in the privacy of the elderly person’s home, mostly by his or her family members, Elder abuse victims are often unwilling to report their abuse for the fear of others’ disbelief, fear of loss of independence, fear of being institutionalized, fear of losing their only social support (especially if the perpetrator is a relative), and fear of being subject to future retaliation by the perpetrator. Elder abuse victims’ cognitive decline ill health may prevent them from reporting their abuse. Also, lack of proper training of service providers such as social workers, law enforcement, nurses, etc., about elder abuse, therefore the number of cases reported tend to be low for elders. Another reason why there is a lack of accurate statistics is the debate to include self neglect or not. Many are unsure if it should be included since it does not involve another person as the abuser. Those opposed to the inclusion of self-neglect make the claim that is a different form of abuse and thus, should not be included in the statistics. The subjective nature of elder abuse is very hard to distinguish on what is considered abuse, and the interpretation on what constitutes as abuse, which is also why statistics are 100% accurate as well.

### **Context of other Provinces**

Alberta has resources in place to help bring awareness into the communities about Elder Abuse. The Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council is a group of Albertans dedicated to increasing awareness and supporting a community response to elder abuse. Canada's fastest growing population is over the age of 65 and rapidly becoming vulnerable to abuse that can rob older adults of their well-being, dignity and, horrifyingly, their lives. This province has a wide network of professionals that not only bring awareness into the communities but also work with older persons promoting the well-being and security of the individuals. AEAAC also develop resources to address and educate the community about elder abuse, such as, what to look for, indicators that an elderly person is being abused and how to report, also who to contact. They also use a safety plan, for elders to protect themselves in a safe way if they are unable to safely report the abuse or live with the abuser where they are unable to ask for help. Governments, community and non-profit organizations, social services agencies, health care providers, police, and concerned citizens work together to prevent and address elder abuse throughout Alberta. Alberta also has laws that are implemented throughout the province that are used to protect elders from the abuse they experience.

British Columbia also has access to elder abuse hotlines. In 1992, Seniors NL (previously known as the Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador) brought together expertise from government and the community to form a committee to raise awareness of elder abuse and to share information about referral and intervention services. This included the development of a Speakers Bureau in 1996 to do presentations about elder abuse. In 2005, the committee developed a *Strategic Plan to Address Elder Abuse in Newfoundland and Labrador* and presented it to the provincial government. The plan made recommendations to both

government and community around six key provincial elder abuse issues: elder abuse legislation; community response to elder abuse; public awareness and education; training and screening for service providers; caregiver support; and research. ([www.nlnpea.ca/Who\\_We\\_Are#values](http://www.nlnpea.ca/Who_We_Are#values)).

Saskatchewan is not just falling behind when it comes to having access to resources and awareness about elder abuse, but also to the implementation of legislation in our province. Many other provinces carry a separate legislation laws that are in place to protect older adults that either live in short term and long-term care home but also reside with a family member that could be intentionally or unintentionally causing the abuse to an elder person. Saskatchewan not only needs Elder abuse helplines to assist in protecting elderly people, but also have the resources and information to also bring awareness into our community, so society is made aware that this is a national issue that needs to be dealt with.

### **Recommendations.**

Our recommendations include bringing awareness into the communities by using social media sites such as online news, Facebook, twitter act., which also bringing it into schools as part of the curriculum. Our education system in elementary schools teaches bullying intervention, and how to talk about it, but as you enter a high school, none of those issues are mentioned let alone mental health or abuse yet our province is one of the highest provinces that deals with abuse especially in the home. Having a curriculum that teaches students, about mental disability, cognitive disabilities, family violence and elder abuse is crucial and key to bringing awareness into our community. We also propose that webinars and seminars should also take place in our province, especially in the workplace, where elder abuse can also be made aware of. By the year 2031, there will be an increase of 98% of individuals 55 years or older within our community, and if we don't teach student about the realities of abuse and the compassion and

patient to help those the most vulnerable that what are we teaching our kids? University student that are getting degrees in the field of social work, nursing, police studies, human justice etc., should have the requirement of taking classes that deals with abuse that comes in all shapes and forms, including that of elderly people. They should be taught about mental disability, and how it can change over time within any given circumstance and how to handle any given situation where elder abuse is occurring.

Another recommendation is implementing laws not only in our provincial legislation but also our federal legislation as well, especially under the criminal codes. Every province is different and have different laws when it come to the protection of older persons. However, Saskatchewan laws for protection against older persons seems to be non-existent. There are laws that are established through the domestic violence act, but nothing that contributes to the abuse or neglect of an elderly person.

In Saskatchewan we do have hotlines, but no hotlines are available to access through our province. We have crisis intervention, and abuse hotlines, that deal with child abuse, bullying etc., but there are currently no hotlines that are implemented that their focus is on older persons that range from 55 years and older that experience abuse within a care facility or in a family unit. We have hotlines in place for many different situations, but why not run and expand those networks that include the assessment of older persons that experience the abuse, information and referral services as well as community response to elder abuse, that have a range of networks that focus on elder abuse. Also, with expanding those networks, have professional people that have degrees such as social workers, nurses, police etc.

Our province should also include not only research on elder abuse, but also having caregiver support system that can assist with elder abuse. Training and screening for service

providers is also key, in providing the best services to protect older persons from different forms of abuse, and to help assist them in the different needs, and different mental disabilities they may be dealing with, and have an understanding those needs change over time, and having a response and the training to assist elder's when there are a change in circumstances.

### ***Challenges and Benefits.***

By implementing provincial legislation on the protection of elder abuse, the government would be setting guidelines on what constitutes elder abuse and will increase the protection of older person who are just as valuable in our society than any other citizen, and legislation will give them their rights to protection, and an appropriate standard of living that is important to every Canadian. This is where the plan needs to start with implementing provincial legislation into our province, as that will help with following a strategy to not only protect older people but increasing their wellness and security as well. The next step would be being to use the resources and hotlines we currently have in place and expanding those networks. By expanding the existing networks to also focus primarily of elder abuse strategies, information and assisting those who experience some type of abuse, you're not only opening a line of communication, but you're also increasing more job opportunities for people. Having students for example operate those lines as part of their internship, but also giving them the proper training to deal with all different types of abuse, and the knowledge to help the individuals that require assistance. This will not only give students the knowledge they could use for future job opportunities but also expands their personal growth, and awareness to help people that are abused in the future and how to recognize those signs of abuse, even if they are subtle signs.

Some Challenges could include funding, however expanding on the current networks we have in place, rather than adding in new networks and systems the focuses on abuse, we could

use the already implemented networks and expand those services. The benefits for expanding those existing networks is its going to be more cost efficient, and no cost the government much more to add to the existing lines.

*Conclusion.*

*In conclusion elder abuse has been happening throughout history, but it was hidden from the public as it was never considered an important issue. Since 2005, it has been more commonly noticed and seen, due to the growing population of older adults that is projected to reach 25% of the Canadian population by 2031. A growing population means an increase in elder abuse cases that need proper resources and services. Here in Saskatchewan the services are not meeting the demands. Although Saskatchewan offers an array of hotlines that cater to crisis intervention, child abuse, domestic violence, suicide prevention etc., there does not seem to be any hotlines that specifically deal with elder abuse. So how can we go about to make this change? For starters there has been a lack of knowledge and awareness about the severity of the issue. Far too many people simply do not know how many elder abuse cases are reported. Others, might partially know about some aspects of elder abuse and nothing else. In this regard people simply need to be educated and trained so that in the future they will be able to detect and report cases of abuse.*

*Next is the lack of legislation, other provinces make an active effort to have laws set in place, understanding about what constitutes abuse and the signs and ways on how elder abuse should be dealt with. Our legislation laws are there to set order with any community, yet Saskatchewan seems to be lacking in the demands of procedure in protecting elders from a variety of types of abuse that is happening, yet no laws have yet been implemented to protect older adults.*

*Finally, when it comes to our province and potentially creating a hotline for elder abuse case, if funding is crucial then a simple solution would be to simply expand the current hotlines that are offered. Seeing as there are already hotlines numerous hotlines all throughout the province many of which focusing on cases of abuse, it would be much more cost efficient to open new positions within to current offices and have individuals who are trained to deal with elder abuse case.*

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