

# Elder Abuse Consultation Report



Older people within Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) communities can suffer financial, mental and physical abuse and be afraid to speak out for fear of abandonment – or even be unaware the problems they experience are termed as abuse.

In the first Scottish national consultation of its kind, the findings of the Lottery-funded Older People Services Development Project show, contrary to the perception BME communities ‘always look after their own’, this group of older people can face a range of difficulties.

The findings lift the lid on the sensitive issue of elder abuse that is often swept under the carpet by BME communities rather than discussed.

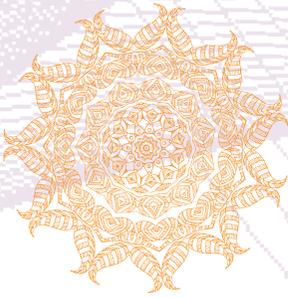
Project staff consulted more than 350 BME older people across Scotland on elder abuse. Most

of these discussions were held within groups in day care centres but some of the consultation has been carried out one to one on the phone or face to face with individuals.

This revealed that while many older BME people prefer to live with their extended family, having children who work and grandchildren who need to be cared for means problems can develop in some cases.

The problem is not restricted to those living with extended family, it could also happen while parents are living in their own accommodation but rely on children to manage their finances and children take control and make decisions on their behalf.

Of course, there are many cases where older parents are well looked after by their children and are very happy in their extended family group.



But the project revealed a number of emerging issues, with some people saying they felt controlled both financially and emotionally by their children. Another key finding is that while some older people felt unhappy they did not understand the term or what would constitute 'abuse'.

The following issues were raised during the consultations – financial abuse, physical neglect and sometimes abuse, lack of respect or compassion and loneliness and isolation.

A number of measures are needed to help tackle the knowledge and information gap, to support older BME people in understanding their rights and how to access help when they need it.

There should also be further training for social workers and other agencies to help them identify the signs of elder abuse or neglect within ethnic minority communities.

## Key findings:

### **Financial abuse – where children take control of their finances**

In many cases older people do not know how much they receive and what is in their bank balance. In many instances they are asked to sign off finances to the children. When looking for their own money the response can be: 'What do you need it for? You have everything you need'. Some feel they are put under pressure to transfer their inheritance to children when they are alive rather than leaving it for them after they die.

### **Physical neglect/abuse**

Food provided might not be suitable for their age which could lead to ill health. Some find it difficult to visit doctors or hospital due to health and language problems and rely on family to take them – but children/family are too busy to take them for appointments in the time they wished to be seen by a doctor.

### **Lack of respect/compassion**

Many people feel they are not treated with respect and their activities are controlled by the family. Children can be too busy with their lives to teach their parents how to use bank machines/manage finances etc and prefer taking control to manage things for them.

## Loneliness and isolation

In some cases parents (particularly if they are a widow/er) are shared between children and only stay with each for a short period. People can feel they do not have a place to call home. When a life partner is lost they are expected to sell up the place where they have lived a long time to move near their children – so are also taken away from friends and social circles established over the years. Often, their children work long hours and do not have time for their parents.

## Fear

Some of those consulted knew of others where abuse is taking place but do not wish to question it in the fear of family relationships breaking down. Most agreed the issues are brushed under the carpet as they worried it might bring shame to the family or become a talking point in the close-knit community. But those frightened to speak out do not want to upset their children as they fear they will have nothing to do with them. Some also said they felt a burden.

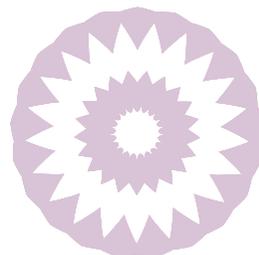


## What is needed?

- > Accessible information on what classifies elder abuse.
- > Accessible information on the agencies that can provide help and support.
- > Signposting to someone elderly people can talk to in confidence, as many elderly people feel more comfortable speaking to an individual than in a group to give full picture of circumstances and their concerns.
- > Better understanding and involvement by social work.
- > More information on individual rights.
- > Further discussions or talks on the subject in a workshop in their first language.
- > A help line available in a number of languages.
- > Day centres staff to be more vigilant about any signs of abuse – visible or non-visible.
- > Support staff should know how to share their concerns with someone if they see signs of abuse or neglect.
- > Support workers should also be trained on in identifying signs of abuse or neglect.

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- Shanti Bhavan Day Care Centre, Glasgow
- Mel Milaap Day Centre, Glasgow
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- North Ayrshire Chinese Lunch Club
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- Chinese Older People, Aberdeen
- Chinese Older People, Fife
- Milan, Burnbank Lunch Club, Hamilton
- Fairweather Lunch Club – Newton Mearns
- Lanarkshire Chinese Association
- Wah Lok Day Centre, Glasgow
- Central Scotland Chinese Association, Stirling
- Bhartiya Ashram, Chinese Lunch Club, Dundee



\*Most focus groups discussed elder abuse once but two were visited for a second time for in-depth discussion. It was interesting to see that during this second meeting people were more open and many points were raised. It is evident ongoing discussion does give older people confidence to talk about the issues of concern that are affecting them.

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