

# Desperate need for elder abuse prevention research, says new report

August 16 2016, by Niki Widdowson

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Focused, well-funded research on elder abuse prevention is urgently needed given the lack of high-quality research in this area and the ageing of the population, says QUT Professor of Public Health Philip Baker who conducted a Cochrane Review, released today, of studies from around the world.

Professor Baker, from QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, reviewed seven studies on the effects of different interventions designed to stop elder abuse, which involved 1924 elderly participants and 740 carers and health workers.

"It has been estimated that 5 per cent of elderly Australians experience abuse, however these estimates are probably low as significant problems in the quantification and reporting of elder abuse exist," Professor Baker said.

"In Australia, nine advocacy and elder abuse agencies operating telephone helplines reported assisting 6784 clients in 2015 alone, similar to figures in other countries.

"In 63 per cent of cases the perpetrators were the children of the older person and 39 per cent of cases were psychological abuse, 37 per cent of cases were financial and 9 per cent for [physical abuse](#) and neglect.

"Greed and/or a sense of entitlement over the [older person's](#) assets tends contribute to elder abuse."

Professor Baker said some studies had used carer education as the primary intervention while others turned to educational and support programs for the victims.

"As most of the evidence from these studies was low or very low quality we cannot assume the findings of the studies are true. We did not find conclusive evidence for solutions to prevent elder abuse or its reoccurrence.

"We did find, however, that teaching coping strategies to family carers of elderly with dementia probably reduces anxiety and depression of carers, which possibly could lead to better outcomes for the elderly.

"We found no conclusive evidence that caregiver training focussed on improved knowledge is successful in reducing abuse.

"The programs which aimed to detect abuse may have led to improved identification of abused elderly and their abusers, but it is uncertain whether they led to less abuse."

Professor Baker said the two studies concerned with providing abuse victims with social support and education had yielded disappointing results.

"One study of 403 residents found those who participated in the intervention had a much higher rate of abuse, in other words, the opposite of the hoped effect," he said.

"The other one was conducted on only 16 subjects and was thus too small to detect a difference.

"In all, we noticed a distinct absence of research that evaluated the effects of elder abuse prevention programs, apart from the slight

evidence that teaching coping skills to carers of people with dementia reduced their depression and anxiety.

"Disappointingly, there is considerable uncertainty in the limited research and little to guide the development of a best practice model of care and prevention.

"We have an ageing population and we can expect [elder abuse](#) to increase unless we put funds and effort into high-quality research to find solutions to prevent this abuse of vulnerable members of our community."

**More information:** Baker PRA, Francis DP, Hairi NN, Othman S, Choo WY. Interventions for preventing abuse in the elderly. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2016, Issue 8. Art. No.: CD010321. [DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD010321.pub2](https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD010321.pub2)

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