

ILLUMINATING THE SHADOWS - ELDER ABUSE IN THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

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Fraser University

CREA Research Day, February 12, 2026



Presentation Outline

- This presentation describes three different knowledge and capacity-building projects, dating back to 2015 and our first CREA grant,. All are focused on better understanding and raising awareness of LGBT+ elder abuse.

Background:

In 2015 when funding was first received from CREA, the BC Council to Reduce Elder Abuse, there was little in the elder abuse literature about size of the problem or about the needs and special vulnerabilities of LGBT+ older adults

However, compared to heterosexual age peers LGBTQ older adults are:

- up to 3X more likely to live alone (de Vries & Blando, 2004)
- report high rates of loneliness and isolation (Kuyper & Fokkema, 2010) especially in rural areas
- are less likely to have children, and if they do, their children are less likely to be supportive (Tjepkema, 2008; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2013).
- LGBTQ couples are more likely to have experienced trauma and more likely to have abused drugs and alcohol

These are all known risk factors for elder abuse, neglect, & exploitation

Objectives of Project #1

1) Raise awareness of elder abuse **within** the LGBT community and familiarize current/potential victims with services available in their local community

2) Raise awareness among service providers and seniors' organizations of the special needs/risks of LGBT older adults

Interdisciplinary Intergenerational Arts Activism

Method

- Review of literature (undertaken by Academics on the team)
- Education of youth/elder team members (Academics)
- Submission of ideas for fact sheets and videos (youth and elders)
- Capacity building (Arts facilitator)
 - Artistic choices
 - Film and design basics
- Filming and editing (youth, elders, Arts facilitator)

Products & Dissemination

- 5 High-impact Poster/Fact Sheets
- 3 Videos
 - A F-M Trans person in residential care who asks for a pap smear
 - A lesbian couple, one of whom physically and psychologically abuses the other because she forgot to dress 'properly' for an impending visit by her grandchildren.
- - A gay male couple where the younger partner makes unauthorized withdrawals from the older partner's bank account
- Dissemination - 6 Town Halls; 2 "discussion sessions" with Chinese and South Asian community service providers (all)
- Evaluation – exit surveys at Town Halls

Our team

Youth for A Change (YfAC)

A group of youth activists & advocates based in Surrey, BC
Ages ranged from 13-21



- They offer workshops; network; lobby; create art and performance; advocate; educate; monitor public policy and host youth events.



The Queer Imaging & Riting Kollektive for Elders (QUIRK-E)

An Activist Arts Collective based at Britannia Services Centre in East Vancouver

Ages range from 60-84

Funded by City of Vancouver, Britannia, and QMUNITY

Academics

Gloria Gutman, PhD: Project Leader



Professor Emerita SFU Gerontology, Immediate Past President, International Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)

Kelsey Blair, MA: Arts Facilitator



Doctoral student, English Dept. SFU & Co-facilitator of Quirk-e

Academics



Jen Marchbank, PhD, Professor,
Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies,
SFU & Sylvie Traphan
Co-facilitators of Youth For A Change



Claire Robson, PhD, Adjunct Professor,
Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies,
SFU
Co-facilitator of Quirk-e



Transgender Woman
Quilter
Engineer
Visually Impaired

**Emotionally
ABUSED**

For help call the Seniors Abuse & Information Line:
604.437.1940 or 1.866.437-1940 (toll free) or your
local health authority



Gay

Film Buff

Grandfather

Early Onset Dementia

**Financially
ABUSED**

For help call the Seniors Abuse &
Information Line: 604.437.1940 or
1.866.437-1940 (toll free) or your
local health authority



**Queer
Mother
Arthritic
Dentist**

**Physically
ABUSED**

For help call the Seniors Abuse & Information Line:
604.437.1940 or 1.866.437-1940 (toll free) or your
local health authority

A photograph of a middle-aged man with short grey hair and glasses, smiling broadly. He is wearing a purple zip-up hoodie over a grey and white horizontally striped polo shirt, and blue jeans. He is standing on a paved area with some blue markings, possibly a playground or park. The background shows green trees and a building. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**Bisexual
Foodie
Cyclist
History**

**Sexually
ABUSED**

For help call the Seniors Abuse &
Information Line: 604.437.1940 or
1.866.437-1940 (toll free) or your
local health authority



Lesbian
New Canadian
Diabetic
Grandmother

**ABUSED &
NEGLECTED**

For help call the Seniors Abuse & Information Line: 604.437.1940 or
1.866.437-1940 (toll free) or your
local health authority

LGBTQ Elder Abuse: What Do You know?

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse occurs when people in positions of trust harm elders, either through their actions or their failure to act.

What is Emotional Abuse?

Severe or persistent verbal/non-verbal behavior that results in emotional or psychological harm.*

Who Commits Elder Abuse?

- Private households (family, lovers, friends, children, neighbours, caregivers).
- Institutions such as hospitals, care homes, and assisted living (staff, visitors, other residents).

Why are Older LGBTQ People More Vulnerable to

- Stigma and prejudice makes them an “invisible population”
- They are twice as likely to be single, aging alone
- They are less likely to have children or find them supportive
- They are more likely to have experienced trauma and to have had drug and alcohol issues

Why are LGBTQ People Less Likely to Report Abuse?

- They may not wish to give others even more cause to criticize them.
- They may not be out.

Where to Find Help or Further Information:

If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

Seniors Abuse & Information Line at the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy & Support: 604.437.1940 or 1.866.437-1940 (toll free)

Fraser Health: 1-877-732-2808 or visit www.fraserhealth.ca/your_care/adult_abuse_and_neglect/

Interior Health: For direct community numbers visit www.interiorhealth.ca/reportabuse

Island Health South Island: 1-888-533-2273; **Central Island** 1-877-734-4101; **North Island** 1-866-928-4988

Northern Health: Northern Health Adult Protection Line 1-844-465-7414

Vancouver Coastal Health: ReAct Adult Protection Program 1-877-732-2899

* Abuse Definitions: National Initiative for Care of the Elderly 2015

This fact sheet was produced by the Simon Fraser University Gerontology Research Centre in cooperation with QUIRK-E and Youth for A Change, supported by a grant from the BC Committee to Reduce Elder Abuse (CREA)



- ▶ Claire Robson (GSWS, BOLDfest, Quirk-e)
- ▶ Jen Marchbank (GSWS, Surrey Pride Society, Y4AC)
- ▶ Gloria Gutman (Gerontology, SFU)
- ▶ Makaela Prentice (RA)

An innovative
partnership



- ▶ Courtney Dieckbrader (Specialist in Seniors Programming)
- ▶ Devan Christian (Trauma Counsellor)

Why did we need this project?

- Queer elders are more likely to
- ▶ Live alone
 - ▶ Be depressed
 - ▶ Have one or more disabilities
 - ▶ Have less or no contact with their family of origin
 - ▶ Have experienced trauma
 - ▶ Self-medicate

Project Participants

- 2 transwomen
- 2 gay men
- 5 lesbians
- Interviews were also conducted with QMUNITY's seniors' specialist & an experienced trauma counsellor

Context and type of abuse experienced by study participants

- In-home care
 - Inappropriate touching & neglect Trudy
 - Neglect & failure to recognize her lesbian widowhood Zoe
- Institutions
 - Ostracism and spiritual abuse in religious organizations Grace
- Residential care
 - Neglect, overmedication, harassment & physical abuse Michele
 - Neglect Donald
- Within Romantic Relationship
 - Financial abuse, emotional abuse (death threats) Bruce
 - Financial abuse, emotional/psychological abuse Pam
- Within Lesbian Community
 - Financial abuse, theft Flygirl

Findings

Participants experienced a strong sense of difference and dislocation, which 'put a target on their backs,' and may have contributed to the early abuse reported by all

At the same time, they did not have the mentorship and family support that might have helped them navigate this situation

Trudy's story

- Experienced an early sense of difference
- Attempted suicide at age of six
- Frequented gay bars from the age of 14
- Arrested and subjected to weekly conversion therapy
- Underwent gender affirming surgery in NYC

- Abused by in home care staff
 - Ignored
 - Subject to homophobic slights & inappropriate touch

Systemic cultural violence



- Our cohort of queer elders lived through a time when
 - Being gay was a crime
 - Being gay was an illness
 - Many of us lived in the closet
 - We could not marry so our financial arrangements were often informal
 - We experienced constant slights and psychic wounding (and still do)
 - We were not counted in the census (gender identity only added last year) and thus not identified as needing specific services.
- This makes us more likely to tolerate and accept high levels of abuse

Their relationship with health care professionals has been troubled

- ▶ The AIDS epidemic left them with deep distrust of medical institutions
- ▶ Doctors, nurses and elder care providers still exhibit ignorance and homo/transphobia
- ▶ They are less likely to visit doctors...
- ▶ ...and less likely to come out when they do

International Perspectives on Aging 37

Claire Robson · Jen Marchbank · Gloria Gutman · Makaela Prentice

Elder Abuse in the LGBTQ2SA+ Community

The Impact of Homophobia and Transphobia

This book describes and analyzes the lived experience of elder abuse from the queer community. It discusses the experiences by transwomen, gay men and lesbians of financial abuse, physical and sexual abuse, homophobic abuse, and neglect within partner relationships, residential care, in home care, and religious organizations. Queer and trans elders have been described as "The Silent Generation", since they have lived through times when their sexual and gender identities were criminalized and pathologized. The book shows that they are far more at risk to suffer abuse and neglect by those they should be able to trust, since they are more likely to have encountered all key risk factors, such as isolation, previous abuse and trauma, and mistrust of the health care system. Their vulnerability has been overlooked and this book addresses that gap. As such, this book provides a great resource to anyone working with elders, including medical professionals, care providers, police, counsellors, and policy makers.

ISBN 978-3-031-33316-3



springer.com

Robson · Marchbank · Gutman ·
Prentice



Elder Abuse in the LGBTQ2SA+ Community

International Perspectives on Aging 37
Series Editors: Jason L. Powell, Sheying Chen

Claire Robson
Jen Marchbank
Gloria Gutman
Makaela Prentice

Elder Abuse in the LGBTQ2SA+ Community

The Impact of Homophobia and
Transphobia

 Springer

Recommendations

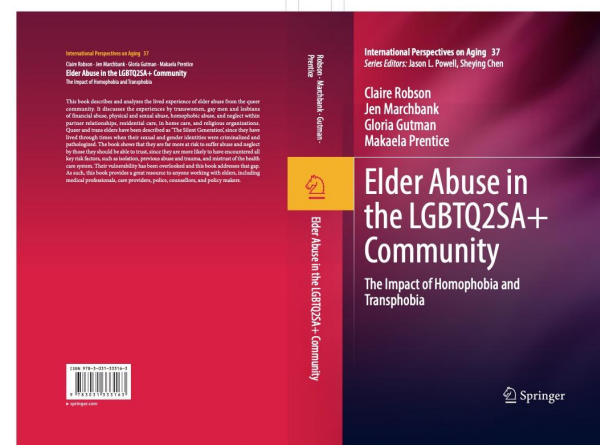
- Service providers must not assume cis/het, nor assume clients wish to disclose That said, intake procedures should allow for disclosure if desired
- Dedicated means of reporting abuse for GSM people
- Queer competency training for all, especially ‘on the ground’ staff – ongoing
- Awareness of complex history of GSM folks
 - signage eg rainbow flags – safe space
 - GSM themed events – speakers, Pride breakfast
 - GSM media available
 - inclusive language
 - zero tolerance of homo/transphobic behaviour
- Increased availability of affordable counselling & supports for survivors
- Further research required, both quantitative and qualitative

Products: Book, Journal Special Issue, Fact Sheets

<https://www.lidsen.com/journals/geriatrics/geriatrics-special-issues/Elder-Abuse-LGBT-Community-Hidden-Problem>

https://scholar.google.ca/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=V3fUuW0AAAJ&citation_for_view=V3fUuW0AAAJ:iH-uZ7U-co4C

Understanding and Addressing Elder Abuse in Gender and Sexual Minority Communities



3. Quantitative Analyses



Elder Abuse Prevalence and Perpetrators: Does abuse type and victim SOGI make a difference?

Findings from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA)

Research Team:

- Gloria Gutman¹
- Mojgan Karbakhsh¹
- Heather Stewart²

1. Gerontology Research Centre, Simon Fraser University.

2. Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, Simon Fraser University & The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE AND WHERE IT OCCURS

Internationally recognized types are:

- Physical
- Psychological
- Financial
- Sexual
- Neglect

- Elder abuse and neglect occurs in multiple settings - in the community and across a range of institutional settings
- Psychological and financial are the most common

Source: Podnieks, Pillemer, Nicholson, et al. 1990; Boldy, Horner, Crouchley, et al, 2005; Ockleford, Barnes-Holmes, Morichellim et al, 2003)

- Multiple forms - many victims experience more than one type, concurrently or sequentially

• Source: Anme & Tatar, 2005; Boldy, Horner, Crouchley et al, 2005; Vida & Des Rosiers, 2002

Objectives

1. To estimate the prevalence of three different types of elder abuse among heterosexual and LGB Canadian older adults
Types of abuse examined: psychological, physical, financial
2. Explore perpetrator profiles.
Relationship to victim, sex, living with the victim (Y/N)

Methods



- The Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) is a national cohort study of 51,338 Canadian residents, aged 45–85 years at baseline (2012–2015), with follow-ups conducted every 3 years, for at least 20 years (until 2033) or until death or loss to follow-up.
- We analyzed data from CLSA participants aged 65 and over at follow-up 1 (n=23,466), first time elder abuse questions were asked.
- Eligible participants had to be physically and cognitively able to participate on their own, and able to communicate in English or French.

Psychological Abuse

Over the past 12 months has anyone criticized you?
How often did this happen over the last 12 months?
Who did this?
Was this person male or female?
Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone insulted you?
How often did this happen over the last 12 months?
Who did this? Was this person male or female?
Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone threatened or intimidated you?
How often did this happen over the last 12 months?
Who did this? Was this person male or female?
Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone excluded you or ignored you?
How often did this happen over the last 12 months?
Who did this? Was this person male or female?
Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

- Psychological abuse was deemed present if the criticism, insulting, or exclusion/ignoring items were affirmed with a past-year frequency of “many times” or “every day”.
- For the threats/intimidation item, any level of past-year frequency was deemed as positive (Burnes et al., 2022).

Physical Abuse

Over the past 12 months has anyone pushed, shoved or grabbed you?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you

Over the past 12 months has anyone thrown something at you?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you

Over the past 12 months has anyone hit or slapped you?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone tried to hit you with something?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone tried to choke you with something?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone threatened you with a weapon? How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this? Was this person male or female?

that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Financial Abuse

Over the past 12 months has anyone made you give them your money, possessions or property?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this?

Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone taken money, possessions or property from you?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this?

Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

Over the past 12 months has anyone deliberately prevented your access to your money, possessions, or property?

How often did this happen over the last 12 months?

Who did this?

Was this person male or female?

Did that person (or any of those persons) live with you then?

% Experiencing any type of elder abuse by survivor's SOGI

Overall prevalence: 10.0%

P
value=0.009

% Experiencing psychological abuse by survivor's SOGI

Overall prevalence: 8.8%

P
value=0.017

% Experiencing financial abuse by survivor's SOGI

Overall prevalence: 1.3%

P
value<0.001

% Experiencing physical abuse by survivor's SOGI

Overall prevalence: 1.3%

P value=0.236

Psychological abuse: perpetrator relationship by SOGI of survivor

*** Among individuals who reported psychological abuse over the last 12 months
(Weighted sample n=411,526)**

What do we know about “other” perpetrators?

Open text response to Q1-Took money, possessions or property Q2- Made you give money, possessions or property:

- furnace/hot water heater rental company kept taking out money even after she moved.
- a robber broke into our home
- Acquaintance
- Apartment superintendents, one male one female
- Ex-spouse & lawyers; lawyer
- Adopted child, aunt, brother
- Guy from street, guy from bar, panhandler
- Tenant
- Neighbour
- Work colleague
- Stranger; stranger pretending to be ministry of transport
- Bank; CRA, taxation - government
- False advertising on internet, internet scam, someone met on internet, telemarketer, spam or telephone, fraud online

**Psychological abuse: perpetrator lived with the victim (Y/N) by
SOGI of survivor**

*** Among individuals who reported psychological abuse over the last 12 months
(Weighted sample n=411,526)**

Physical abuse: perpetrator relationship by SOGI of survivor

*** Among individuals who reported physical abuse over the last 12 months
(Weighted sample n=59,482)**

Financial abuse: perpetrator relationship by SOGI of survivor

*** Among individuals who reported financial abuse over the last 12 months
(Weighted sample n=65,575)**

What do we know about “other” perpetrators?

Open text response to Q1-Took money, possessions or property Q2- Made you give money, possessions or property:

- furnace/hot water heater rental company kept taking out money even after she moved.
- a robber broke into our home
- Acquaintance
- Apartment superintendents, one male one female
- Ex-spouse & lawyers; lawyer
- Adopted child, aunt, brother
- Guy from street, guy from bar, panhandler
- Tenant
- Neighbour
- Work colleague
- Stranger; stranger pretending to be ministry of transport
- Bank; CRA, taxation - government
- False advertising on internet, internet scam, someone met on internet, telemarketer, spam or telephone, fraud online

Summary

- Psychological abuse was most common, experienced by 8.8% of the sample; rate for physical and financial was 1.3%
- L/B women were more likely than individuals in the other SOGI groups to have experienced psychological and financial abuse; G/B men were most likely to have experienced physical abuse.
- Perpetrator relationship:
 - psychological and physical abuse: most commonly spouse/partner, followed by child, and friend.
 - financial abuse: most commonly “other”

Summary

- Psychological and physical abuse: most commonly perpetrated by someone who lived with the victim.
- Financial abuse: most commonly perpetrator was a male who did not live with the victims.
- Patterns differed among SOGI groups

THE WAY FORWARD...



Photo by Coombes
from Pixabay

RECOGNIZE THAT RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS DIFFER FOR DIFFERENT LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND ABUSE TYPES AS WELL AS BY SURVIVOR'S SOGI



- “Safer at Home” was a slogan used to promote staying at home as a means of curbing the spread of COVID-19.
- But the potential for violence spikes when people spend 24/7 isolated at home with their abuser(s).
 - In the case of an older adult, the abuser can be a spouse or same sex partner, child, other relative or, a hired/paid or even a volunteer caregiver.
- Living alone may be a protective factor for physical abuse, but a risk factor for financial abuse, fraud and scams.
- Researchers’ and lay persons’ definition of abuse vary

Ageism, discrimination or abuse?

- “A family doctor dismissed me as a patient (I didn’t know that was even a possible thing). And a lab tech called me ‘childish’ repeatedly because I hadn’t signed in on my cell phone. Both hurt a lot. I am still struggling with the doc dismissal in a situation of shortage of GPs” (age 65+ female).

Work in Progress & Planned

Currently

Analysis of CLSA Intimate Partner Violence Module (first administered Wave 3)

Planned

Longitudinal analysis using repeated elder abuse and IPV modules (Waves 4 & 5 respectively)