

**CARP Elder Abuse Poll Report  
June 28, 2013**

**Key Findings**

**A small but insistent proportion of members have been abused as elders across the years we've polled, but many more know someone who has been abused, more than 6 times the official estimates, which would indicate substantial under-reporting.**

**There is agreement that greater public and official/media awareness will lead to the increasingly socially taboo status of elder abuse, but there is some division of opinion on whether all elder abuse is automatically a crime or whether some cases should be handled informally. There are seen to be exceptions for dementia, other seniors and family caregivers, some of whom may require treatment rather than sanctions.**

**While elder abuse is not seen to be as socially unacceptable as child abuse, there is agreement it will become so, on average, members think, in about 9 years. The chief motivators for elder abuse by those in trust are seen to be either caregiver burnout and frustration or lack of empathy for older people.**

**While elder shelters are seen to be useful, many agree that most want to stay in their homes, and fear of losing one's home is seen to be one of the most common reasons abuse is not reported, along with fear of retribution and the fact the abuser may be a close family member. An emergency hotline is seen to be an essential tool and most would use one, some anonymously. There is very little awareness of existing hotlines. The first report of abuse is seen to be to the family, not to authorities.**

**The majority would cast their vote depending on a candidate's commitment to a sustained and comprehensive national program of anti-elder abuse programming. The Conservatives have lost favour among members to the Liberals, who now lead in voter preference. The NDP is in deep third place.**

**CONCLUSION**

**While members are deeply concerned with the seriousness and outcomes of elder abuse, and the need for uncompromising action, they also understand it is not a black-and-white problem, but has shades of nuance which defy easy solutions.**

## Detailed Findings

Incidence of being abused, or knowing someone who has been, is remarkably stable across two years of polling, indicating the validity of this data. While very few members have been abused (3%), as many as a third know someone who has been (35%).

***Elder abuse can be physical abuse, verbal and psychological abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. Have you, or has anyone you know ever been a victim of elder abuse?***

	<b>December 2011</b>	<b>October 2012</b>	<b>June 2013</b>
<b>YES</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Me</b>	2%	4%	3%
<b>Someone I know</b>	32%	33%	35%
<b>NO</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>PREFER NOT TO ANSWER</b>	n/a	1%	1%

Financial abuse is known to be the most common form of elder abuse, and this is mirrored among members exposed to abuse (45% now, 46% last year), followed by verbal abuse (25% now, 31% last year).

***What form did this abuse take?***

	<b>December 2011</b>	<b>October 2012</b>	<b>June 2013</b>
<b>Financial abuse</b>	50%	46%	45%
<b>Verbal abuse</b>	23%	31%	25%
<b>Neglect</b>	18%	13%	14%
<b>Physical abuse</b>	5%	6%	11%
<b>OTHER</b>	4%	4%	6%

More public awareness (31%) and more official awareness (12%), plus the fact elder abuse is increasingly unacceptable (16%) are earmarks progress has been made, but one fifth of members believe little progress has been made (21%). Very few think elder abuse is not a problem (1%).

***June 15 is Elder Abuse Awareness Day. CARP has worked to eradicate elder abuse. What progress has been made?***

<b>More public awareness</b>	31%
<b>Little progress has been made</b>	21%
<b>Elder abuse is becoming more socially unacceptable</b>	16%
<b>More media/official awareness</b>	12%
<b>Small actions being taken by governments</b>	5%
<b>Significant actions being taken by governments</b>	4%
<b>Enough has been done/awareness is high</b>	*
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	12%
<b>ELDER ABUSE NOT A PROBLEM</b>	1%

Six-in-ten would expect elder abuse to be treated as a crime (60%), while a fifth would see it treated informally (20%). As many as an eighth have no opinion (13%).

***If you or someone you knew were abused in the manner described, would you expect it to be treated as a criminal case or would you expect it to be handled informally?***

<b>Criminal case</b>	60%
<b>Handled informally</b>	20%
<b>OTHER</b>	7%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	13%

There is a split in opinion on whether all cases of abuse are crimes, as one half thinks they are (51%), every occurrence (35%), while just fewer think not (45%).

***Should every case of elder abuse be treated as a criminal case?***

<b>YES</b>	<b>51%</b>
Every occurrence, no matter how minor	35%
Only major incidents with violence	11%
But not among family members	1%
(OTHER)	4%
<b>NO</b>	<b>45%</b>
Some cases should be handled informally	42%
(OTHER)	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>5%</b>

Members think the caregiver should be removed first when they are the abuser (27%), followed closely by those who think the police should be notified first (23%). Just fewer would confront the caregiver (18%) and some would make a report to Social Services (12%).

***In many cases the abuser is a caregiver to the victim. What would you expect the first step to be in this case, if someone you knew were being abused?***

Remove caregiver when abuse discovered	27%
Report caregiver to police	23%
Confront caregiver	18%
Report caregiver to social services	12%
Report caregiver to other family member	9%
Report caregiver to employer (if paid)	6%
Provide home support worker/minder	2%
Move victim to hospital/shelter/nursing home	1%
OTHER	2%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>2%</b>

All listed forms of abuse are most likely seen to be equally serious (82%), but child abuse is seen to be many times more serious (13%) than elder abuse (2%).

***Which is the most serious form of abuse, child abuse, spousal abuse or elder abuse?***

<b>All equally serious</b>	82%
<b>Child abuse</b>	13%
<b>Elder abuse</b>	2%
<b>Spousal abuse</b>	2%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	1%

In line with the previous finding, just one seventh think elder abuse has become as socially unacceptable as child abuse (16%), while three quarters do not (73%).

***Child abuse has become completely unacceptable social behaviour in our society. Has elder abuse reached that level of unacceptability?***

<b>Yes</b>	16%
<b>No</b>	73%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	11%

The vast majority agree elder abuse will become as socially unacceptable as child abuse (87%), if authorities take it seriously (45%) and if more victims speak out (32%). One twentieth believes elder abuse is already socially unacceptable (5%).

***Do you agree or disagree elder abuse will eventually be as socially unacceptable as child abuse in the future?***

<b>YES</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>If authorities start taking it seriously</b>	45%
<b>If more people speak out</b>	32%
<b>If awareness built through advertising</b>	7%
<b>(OTHER)</b>	3%
<b>NO</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Too much cultural inertia</b>	2%
<b>Human nature to victimize vulnerable</b>	2%
<b>More serious problems in society</b>	1%
<b>(OTHER)</b>	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	2%
<b>ELDER ABUSE ALREADY SOCIALLY UNACCEPTABLE</b>	5%

On average, members think it will be about 9 years before elder abuse becomes as socially unacceptable as child abuse.

***How long will it take for elder abuse to become completely socially unacceptable in our society?***

<b>Within 5 years</b>	19%
<b>5 to 10 years</b>	25%
<b>10 to 20 years</b>	9%
<b>More than 20 years</b>	4%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>9 YEARS</b>
<b>NEVER</b>	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	22%
<b>ELDER ABUSE ALREADY SOCIALLY UNACCEPTABLE</b>	18%

The two most common reasons explaining abuser behaviour is caregiver burnout and frustration (36%) and a lack of empathy for older people (32%). One is treatable, one is not.

***Fundamentally, elder abuse is about betrayal of trust, when those most vulnerable are victimized by those they depend on for their care. What is the most likely reason for this kind of behaviour by an abuser?***

<b>Extreme frustration/caregiver burnout</b>	36%
<b>Disdain/lack of empathy for older people</b>	32%
<b>Anger management deficit</b>	6%
<b>Not aware of seriousness of crime</b>	6%
<b>Elder in care has extreme dementia</b>	2%
<b>Cultural obstacles/customs</b>	2%
<b>Elder in care is hostile/violent</b>	1%
<b>Mental illness/psychosis</b>	1%
<b>OTHER</b>	4%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	10%

There is a split in opinion on what to do when the abuser is a spouse or another senior - treat the abuser (24%) or prosecute (23%). Just fewer say separating the victim from the abuser is most important (21%).

***In many cases, the abuser is a spouse or companion, and also a senior. What is your reaction to this circumstance?***

<b>More important to treat than punish abuser</b>	24%
<b>All abuse is crime/should prosecute</b>	23%
<b>Separate victim from abuser</b>	21%
<b>Make leeway for spouses/seniors</b>	9%
<b>This matter is for social workers, not police</b>	7%
<b>Isolate abuser from others</b>	4%
<b>Guardian/minder assigned to household</b>	3%
<b>Move victim to shelter</b>	1%
<b>OTHER</b>	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	6%

The majority agree more regularized enforcement of laws regarding power of attorney would help limit abuse (55%), but more than a quarter don't have an opinion on this measure.

***Do you agree or disagree new Canada-wide laws to better regulate and enforce powers of attorney and living wills would do more to prevent elder abuse?***

<b>AGREE</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Agree strongly</b>	17%
<b>Agree</b>	38%
<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	15%
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	2%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	28%

The most common reason given for non-reporting of abuse is fear of retribution by the abuser (34%), followed by the fact the abuser may be a close family member (24%). Some think victims also fear losing their homes (12%).

***Why do you think many cases of elder abuse go unreported by the victim?***

<b>Fear of retribution by abuser</b>	34%
<b>Abuser is close family member</b>	24%
<b>Fear of losing home/care facility</b>	12%
<b>Afraid nothing will be done</b>	8%
<b>Victim uncommunicative/has dementia</b>	8%
<b>Victim wants to protect abuser</b>	4%
<b>“Stockholm Syndrome”/victim identifies with abuser</b>	2%
<b>Fear of police/authorities/cultural obstacles</b>	2%
<b>OTHER</b>	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	4%

Family is the first report members would make in a case of abuse (36%), followed by the facility administrator (for those in residences/care - 22%). Fewer would report to social services (12%) or police (11%) first.

***If you suspected someone you knew was being abused as an older person, what would you do?***

<b>Speak to family first</b>	36%
<b>Speak to care facility administrator first</b>	22%
<b>Speak to social services first</b>	12%
<b>Speak to police first</b>	11%
<b>Speak to caregiver first</b>	6%
<b>Speak to family doctor first</b>	3%
<b>Speak to care facility doctor first</b>	3%
<b>OTHER</b>	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	4%



Awareness and recognition training for police officers is seen to be the best way to help them combat elder abuse (30%), followed by more cooperation between police and social services (23%). Somewhat fewer suggest special units to deal with Crimes Against Seniors in each police force (15%) or social workers attached to police squads (12%).

***What would be the best way to assist police in identifying, investigating and prosecuting elder abuse?***

<b>Abuse awareness/recognition training for police</b>	30%
<b>Cooperation between police and community service</b>	23%
<b>Special Crimes Against Seniors units to respond</b>	15%
<b>Social workers attached to police squads</b>	12%
<b>Special detective squads to investigate/prosecute</b>	6%
<b>Police patrols to include nursing/retirement homes</b>	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	1%
<b>EXISTING MEASURES ARE ADEQUATE</b>	9%

If funding were available, members would like to see it spent on awareness building among the public (26%), among the authorities (18%) and a nationwide emergency hotline staffed by counsellors (21%).

***CARP has called for sustained funding nationwide to combat elder abuse. Where do you think these funds would best be spent?***

<b>Awareness building among general public</b>	26%
<b>Nationwide hotline staffed by counselors</b>	21%
<b>Awareness building among police/judges</b>	18%
<b>Special investigation/prosecution teams</b>	12%
<b>Shelters for seniors at risk</b>	6%
<b>Emergency home care worker/minder</b>	5%
<b>OTHER</b>	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	10%
<b>NEW FUNDING NOT NEEDED</b>	2%

Two thirds of members think anti-elder abuse funding should come from the federal government (63%), while one fifth see a provincial responsibility (20%). Few think funding is not needed (3%).

***Where do you think funding for combating elder abuse should come from?***

<b>Federal government/national funding</b>	63%
<b>Provinces/provincial funding</b>	20%
<b>Private sector/sponsorships</b>	3%
<b>Local/municipal funding</b>	2%
<b>Charity</b>	1%
<b>OTHER</b>	2%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	8%
<b>NEW FUNDING NOT NEEDED</b>	3%

One third of members think the best way to get political action on elder abuse is an organized campaign of e-mailing and letter-writing (36%), while one quarter suggest a direct message about your vote to an MP?MPP (25%) and somewhat fewer argue for more testimony from famous seniors (17%) or case studies (11%). Very few think new measures are not needed (2%).

***While elder abuse remains a serious problem, little political action is taken to prevent it. What is the best way to convince politicians to act on this issue?***

<b>E-mil/write/phone MPs in an organized campaign</b>	36%
<b>Tell MP your vote depends on their support</b>	25%
<b>Testimony from prominent seniors</b>	17%
<b>First hand case studies</b>	11%
<b>Hold demonstrations</b>	2%
<b>OTHER</b>	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	6%
<b>EXISTING MEASURES ARE ADEQUATE</b>	2%

Seven-in-ten members will hold their vote from a candidate who does not support comprehensive anti-elder abuse legislation and funding (70%).

***Would you make a politician's support for comprehensive anti-elder abuse legislation and funding a condition of your vote in the next election?***

<b>YES</b>	<b>70%</b>
Definitely	29%
Probably	41%
<b>NO</b>	<b>22%</b>
Probably not	19%
Definitely not	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>8%</b>

There is little awareness of elder abuse hotlines in general or specifically the 211 hotline (9% each).

***Are you aware of an emergency hotline in your area for reporting elder abuse and getting support/Have you heard of the 211 Emergency Hotline for reporting and getting support on elder abuse?***

	<b>Hotline</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Yes</b>	9%	9%
<b>No</b>	91%	91%

The vast majority would use an emergency hotline to report abuse (88%) and half would do it in every case (52%), while a fifth would if it were anonymous (18%).

***Would you use an emergency hotline to report it if you thought someone you knew was being abused?***

<b>YES</b>	<b>88%</b>
In every case	52%
If it's anonymous	18 %
If I didn't know abuser	6%
(OTHER)	12%
<b>NO</b>	<b>7%</b>
Would intervene myself first	3%
Would report directly to police	2%
If abuser was a family member	1%
(OTHER)	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>HOTLINE NOT NEEDED</b>	<b>1%</b>

The majority think a hotline will be effective (59%), while very few think it is not needed (1%).

***How effective do you think an Emergency Hotline is for reporting and investigating elder abuse?***

<b>EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>59%</b>
Very effective	16%
Somewhat effective	43%
<b>NOT EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>10%</b>
Not very effective	9%
Not at all effective	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>HOTLINE NOT NEEDED</b>	<b>1%</b>

Twice as many say a victim should be moved to a shelter when the abuser is a caregiver or family member in the home (55%) as disagree (23%).

***When the abuser is a family member or caregiver in the home, do you agree or disagree the victim should be moved to an elder shelter?***

<b>AGREE</b>	<b>55%</b>
Agree strongly	17%
Agree	38%
<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>23%</b>
Disagree	20%
Disagree strongly	3%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	<b>22%</b>

One half see elder shelters as effective (51%), especially if they are accessible (29%) and can cater to diverse medical needs (14%). The one third who think they will not be effective (38%) do so primarily because people don't want to leave their homes (27%).

***How effective a solution would elder shelters be to the problem of elder abuse?***

<b>EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>If accessible/well-funded</b>	29%
<b>If they can cater to diverse medical needs</b>	14%
<b>In all cases</b>	2%
<b>(OTHER)</b>	6%
<b>NOT EFFECTIVE</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>People want to stay at home</b>	27%
<b>Institutionalizes victims</b>	8%
<b>Like a nursing home</b>	2%
<b>(OTHER)</b>	1%
<b>DON'T KNOW</b>	11%
<b>SHELTERS NOT NEEDED</b>	1%

## **Electoral Preference**

The Liberals surpassed the NDP as second place party in CARP members' electoral preference in February, and have passed the Conservatives as first place party in the past months. The Liberals are now at 43%, the Conservatives at 37%, the NDP at 15%, and the Greens at 5%.

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decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

***More than 1000 CARP Poll™ panel members responded to this poll between June 14 and June 20, 2013. The margin of error for a probability sample this size is about plus or minus 3%, 19 times out of 20***