

**RESPECT AGING:
AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM FOR
RECOGNIZING, PREVENTING AND INTERVENING
IN VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER PERSONS**

PARTICIPANT MANUAL

*Violence Prevention Initiative – Women’s Policy Office
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador*

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INTRODUCTION

About this Manual

The Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) is a multi-departmental, government-community partnership coordinated by the Women's Policy Office, Executive Council, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The VPI seeks long-term solutions to violence experienced by those most at risk in our society. One VPI priority is to provide information and resources on recognizing, preventing and intervening in violence against older persons.

Violence against older persons is a social issue of growing concern. It has a great impact on people's health, well-being and sense of security. We have an aging population, and people are living longer. According to the 2011 Census, individuals age 65 and older made up close to 16 per cent of the province's population.¹ That figure will increase to 24 per cent by 2025.² Newfoundland and Labrador currently has the oldest population in Canada.³ The problem of violence against older persons will likely get worse unless we are able to effectively increase our awareness, knowledge and skills in violence recognition, prevention and intervention.

This manual was developed as part of a four-year collaborative project between the Violence Prevention Initiative and the Office for Aging and Seniors, Department of Health and Community Services. The goal of the project is to educate and train various target audiences to support them in recognizing, preventing and intervening in violence against older persons. The vision for this project is that all older persons in this province should be able to live free of fear, exploitation and violence in communities that are safe and supportive.

¹ Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2012, May). *Age and Sex Population, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2011 Census*. Retrieved from: http://www.stats.gov.nl.ca/statistics/Census2011/PDF/AGE_SingleYear%20Age%20Sex_NL_2011.pdf.

² Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2012, April). *Population Projections Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved from: <http://www.economics.gov.nl.ca/pdf/Popbyagemedium-web.pdf>.

³ Statistics Canada. (2013, January). *Canada's Population Estimates: Age and Sex*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110928/dq110928a-eng.htm>.

The *Respect Aging* manual is meant to raise awareness and provide information, resources and tools for anyone who interacts with older persons affected by violence or most likely to experience violence.

This manual includes research and experience drawn from Violence Prevention Initiative projects and campaigns. It also uses ideas, insights and advice from people – including older persons - involved in violence prevention and older persons' issues across the province and the country.

This manual is based on the following violence prevention principles:

- People have the right to a safe and secure environment;
- Health, well-being and productivity are enhanced in a violence-free environment;
- The social and cultural roots of violence are based on inequality. Factors such as ability, sexual orientation, economic status or ethnicity can put some populations such as women, children and older persons at even higher risk of violence;
- Society reinforces violence through expressions of sexism, ageism, classism, heterosexism and other biased attitudes;
- Violence is a choice and is preventable. There is strong evidence that effective intervention can reduce and prevent violence;
- Prevention of violence is everyone's responsibility;
- The elimination of violence requires a comprehensive response including prevention, public education, services and enforcement of the law; and,
- Criminal and other acts of violence and abuse require effective consequences, including punishment under the law.

Features of this manual

At the beginning of the manual you will find a section on *Definitions*. You may want to refer to it as you read through the modules. The last section of the manual, *Links*, provides internet resources for additional information or research.

The manual provides information, resources and tools in three focus areas: Recognition, Prevention and Intervention.

Recognition: Violence against older persons cannot be addressed unless it is recognized and reported. The Recognition section looks at:

- The types and indicators (signs) of violence;
- Violence against older persons in residential care facilities;
- Gender dynamics of violence against older persons;
- Diversity, ageism and violence;
- Dynamics of family violence; and,
- The impact and effects of violence against older persons.

Prevention: Prevention of violence against older persons involves building skills and increasing knowledge and awareness. In this section, you will find information on:

- Risk factors and protective factors;
- The root causes of violence;
- Self-understanding for violence prevention;
- Safety planning, both for the older persons themselves and for people who work or interact with older persons most likely to experience violence; and,
- Self-care for helpers, which suggests healthy coping strategies for people who work with victims of violence.

Intervention: In this training manual, Intervention is based on the principle that older persons have the right to make their own choices about their lives. This section contains information on:

- The Violence Prevention Continuum, a model that suggests three ways to address and prevent violence against older persons;
- Intervention approaches and practices, including supportive legislative interventions;
- Barriers and risks in reporting violence; and,
- Helpful resources, including emergency contact information.

Stories from the Front Lines

In most modules of the manual you will find *Stories from the Front Lines*. Many of these stories describe real situations of violence that have happened to older people in this province. Each story was shared by someone who works with older persons in Newfoundland and Labrador. In all stories, names, ages and other identifying information have been changed to maintain privacy.

A Note about Language

Focus on “violence against older persons”, rather than “elder abuse”

In this manual, you will see that we use the term “violence against older persons,” rather than “elder abuse” or “senior abuse”. We believe this language is important for a number of reasons:

1. Violence against older persons is part of the social problem of violence against all age groups. When we refer to “violence against older persons”, we understand that violence can occur at any time in a person’s life. Some people think that violence is only a problem of the young. They think that violent behaviour simply stops at a certain age. The truth is that violence - acts of power and control - exists across the lifespan. A woman who has been physically harmed by her spouse throughout her marriage does not suddenly become a victim of “elder abuse” at age sixty-five; she is a victim of violence;
2. Because of ageism, the expressions “elder abuse” or “senior abuse” may inaccurately imply less serious violence. The terms “elderly” and “seniors” sometimes evoke stereotypical images of vulnerability, unproductiveness and burden. These prejudices are reflected in society’s attitudes and treatment of older persons. Using the term “older persons” includes them in the continuum of the lifespan. It does not just relate to a point in time at which the stereotypes of aging suddenly apply; and,

3. The term “elder” is often used in Aboriginal contexts to describe cultural and spiritual guides who have gifts of insight and understanding. Aboriginal Elders transmit the collective wisdom of the generations. This training program is concerned with violence against older persons from all walks of life and from all cultures. Therefore, the phrase “elder abuse” is not used in this manual.

Who Should Use this Manual?

Respect Aging may be used by anyone who interacts with older persons, and by older persons themselves. It is meant to be an educational resource. This manual provides information and practical tools for violence recognition, prevention and intervention. This material will be useful to you if you are a/an:

- Caregiver (paid or unpaid) for an older person;
- Community leader;
- Community worker;
- Family member of an older person;
- Financial services provider;
- Friend of an older person;
- Government employee;
- Health care professional;
- Justice or law enforcement professional;
- Neighbour of an older person;
- Older person;
- Service provider;
- Volunteer; and/or,
- Youth.

This manual was developed to be used as part of a training program to prevent violence against older persons. Please contact the Violence Prevention Initiative to find out about obtaining the Trainer’s Guide that accompanies this manual:

Violence Prevention Initiative

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