

Elder abuse and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds

Cultural background, values, beliefs and other complex factors may affect the way elder abuse appears, how it may be perceived, and how elder abuse should be responded to.

Information and support from bilingual workers, professionals, multicultural communities and agencies and key people from diverse communities can provide important background information to help understand and respond to concerns which may be elder abuse.

Remember: be aware of your own cultural background, and understand how this may influence your own values, perceptions and interpretation.

Elder abuse in culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- > Culture influences elder abuse, behaviours and actions, and risk factors.
- > Cultural values, beliefs, and traditions influence how families interact and communicate with each other. They influence family roles and responsibilities toward one another, the extent of interdependency and family obligations shared between members. Culture may define how families share their resources and assets, how they solve problems, and whether help is sought from the broader community.
- > In some cultures, the family has a strong central role and decisions are based on trust alone. There is an implicit trust that the family will make decisions and act in the older person's best interests. Where this is not the case, abuse is strongly disapproved of in these cultures. More actions may be taken to cover up the abuse in families where it is present and conceal it from the community.

Suggested considerations

- > Colleagues, clients, culturally diverse communities, and agencies with expertise in cultural diversity can help understand the role of culture, questions to ask, and how to respond to suspected elder abuse.
- > Identify the importance of extended family, important cultural values, expectations, and gender norms.
- > Understand the role of older people in the family and cultural expectations about their care.
- > Who makes important decisions in the family including transfer of resources and assets?
- > How are family problems resolved?
- > What is the cultural experience of decision making?
- > Is migration or settlement in Australia important to the current circumstances?



- > Identify religious and spiritual beliefs, and past experiences important to the older person and their relatives. Are they supported to participate in these?
- > Identify barriers to help seeking behaviours or acceptance of external support, agencies or law enforcement, or cultural stigmas which may be preventing from external help.
- > Who could encourage access to appropriate supports? (e.g. members of the extended family, respected members of the community, religious leaders, physicians).
- > What are the trusted sources of information in the community? What television and radio stations, shows, and personalities are considered reliable? What newspapers and magazines do people read?
- > How do persons with limited English speaking or reading skills get their information? What could you do to assist?
- > Remember seek information from the older person in the first instance.
- > Where this is not possible, a trusted relative or friend, known agency, and/or bi-cultural worker may provide advice about how to support an older person from a culturally diverse background who is at risk, vulnerable or abuse is suspected.

For more information

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