

Elaine Scott from Health and Welfare Canada observed that: "In comparison with other family violence related issues, elder abuse does not appear to be a high priority in the public mind. In fact, the current status of elder abuse as an issue has been described as similar to that of wife abuse ten years ago."⁸

The underlying message from all witnesses was that any mistreatment of older Canadians is unacceptable. It was pointed out that "...the term 'elder abuse'...softens what is a very serious issue..."⁹ Again, the comparison with spousal abuse was made: "I draw the parallel to spouse abuse. Years ago we dismissed it and said it was just a family problem, just abuse, not a crime. However, the tide has turned and people are now saying that spousal abuse is a crime. We have to get the same message across for senior citizens. This is not something to be tolerated."¹⁰

The mere fact of growing old and the societal perception that being older equals being feeble and helpless makes it difficult for seniors to engage support in their defence. Michel Couture of the *Centre de défense des aînés et des aînées du Québec* argued that: "today growing old is hell!...the nightmare that too many senior citizens must live through."¹¹ Being old is not a reflection of life lived with more years to come but in his view, "old people are just put away as if they were nothing more than useless goods."¹²

The Committee heard that older people are themselves hesitant to come forward: "...seniors themselves are reluctant to identify themselves as victims. Some of the reasons appear to be shame, fear of retaliation, abandonment by their family, or institutionalization."¹³ One of the challenges is to increase awareness and involvement among seniors in responding to the issue.

⁸ Elaine Scott, Health and Welfare Canada, Presentation to the Sub-Committee on Senior Citizens Health Issues Concerning the Subject of Elder Abuse, February 2, 1993, p. 5.

⁹ Wahl, 5:21.

¹⁰ Wahl, 5:21.

¹¹ Couture, 4:20.

¹² Couture, 4:20.

¹³ Scott, 1:9.