

INTRODUCTION

The House of Commons Sub-Committee on Senior Citizens Health Issues commenced study on the abuse of the elderly in February, 1993. Over the next three months, members heard from witnesses involved in government, community, academic, business and seniors organizations throughout Canada. Their testimony is found in Issues Nos. 1–10 of the Sub-Committee on Senior Citizens Health Issues for the Third Session of the Thirty-fourth Parliament. Witnesses who met with the Committee members in Washington, D.C. provided useful comparative information from the United States. In addition, several witnesses over the course of the hearings imparted knowledge about approaches used in England and other parts of Europe.

This report highlights the general themes heard by the Committee. It indicates the direction the Committee believes should be taken in responding to the problem of abuse of older Canadians. The current lack of public and professional awareness about the abuse of older Canadians is of major concern. The Committee agrees that there is a need to refocus existing social, medical, and legal services to better address the issue of abuse. In addition to action by governments, Committee members believe that every person in contact with older people has a responsibility.

Elder abuse is an emerging issue. The victimization of older people within the family and within institutions is gaining significance as a crime but, repeatedly, the Committee heard that there is a low level of awareness and of action in the area. As a societal problem, mistreatment of older Canadians is still accorded a minimal profile. Canadians of all ages are reluctant to admit that older adults could be suffering at the hands of family members or other people they should be able to trust.