

The Committee recommends:

- 1. That the federal government in its literature and programs take the lead in establishing consistent usage and common understanding of elder abuse terminology;**
- 2. That any definitions used be tested in various settings across Canada to evaluate their appropriateness for different disciplines and cultures.**

II RISK FACTORS FOR ABUSE

The characteristics of the person who abuses and the person who is abused were the subject of considerable discussion. Several witnesses drew attention to the fact that the majority of abusers were family members. They included spouses, adult children, grandchildren, siblings and other relatives. The abused were predominately female; attributed by some witnesses to the fact that the elderly population has more women than men. They were usually over 75 years and often had multiple health problems.

Pearl McKenzie reported that the cases seen at the North Shore Community Services in North Vancouver fall into four categories. According to her, "most commonly, the abuser of an older woman is still her husband and it's usually a continuation of wife assault. It's wife assault gone old, gone grey." The second group, she called opportunists, people who prey on elderly people, often relatives who "situate themselves where there are some assets like property, where there is some assured income." The third group of abusers consisted of people who were dependent on the older woman for help and support, many of them adult children with serious mental illness. Finally, the abusers were caregivers, people providing care for the elderly either in their homes or in institutions.²⁵

Witnesses acknowledged that recognition for elder abuse evolved from a concern with family violence and that it shared many of the same characteristics. One Voice told the Committee that "victims tend to be isolated, and are generally powerless and dependent on the offenders. Abuse takes place primarily within

²⁵ McKenzie, 8:7 and 8:8.