

...current demographic, socio-cultural and economic trends suggest that abuse of the aged will become a problem of even greater proportions in the years to come. In fact, if projections are correct, by the year 2001 there will be in the order of 3.8 million aged men and women who will account for about 14% of all Canadians and 425,000 of these persons will be 85 years of age and over. This latter group of people—characterized as it will be by a proportionately larger number of women—will be almost twice the size of our present “old old” population and will be most vulnerable to abuse in all its forms. At the same time, the supply of family caregivers will continue to be eroded by an increasing number of women in the workforce and declining birth rate.<sup>40</sup>

On the magnitude of elder abuse, the views of Elaine Scott of Health and Welfare Canada were reinforced by later witnesses:

There are few statistics on the incidence and circumstances surrounding elder abuse. And, it is believed that available figures generally underestimate the scope of the problem. Victims of abuse are reluctant to identify themselves due to feelings of shame, fear of retaliation or abandonment. The problem is further hampered by the fact that some aspects of elder abuse are difficult to identify correctly even by professionals and members of the general public who regularly work with older people.<sup>41</sup>

Since the early 1980s, several Canadian studies have attempted to assess the prevalence of abuse among older Canadians. Many studies took place within a single province and collected data from the more accessible service provider or from case reports rather than the potentially affected older person. Only one national survey, the Ryerson study, carried out in 1989 interviewed older people in their homes.<sup>42</sup>

The majority of witnesses were familiar with the Ryerson study and its indication that at least 4 percent of older Canadians living in private dwellings, suffered from one or more serious forms of abuse at the hands of a spouse, relative or other close contact. The Ryerson study identified financial abuse as the most prevalent form,

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<sup>40</sup> Queensway Carleton Hospital and Nepean Police Service, “An Education Program and Interagency Model for Police Officers on Physical Abuse and Neglect of Seniors,” June 1992, Presentation to Sub-Committee, February 23, 1993.

<sup>41</sup> Scott, Health and Welfare, Presentation to the Sub-Committee, February 2, 1993, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Podnieks et al., *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada*, Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1990.