

WHAT IS THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM?

I THE ISSUE OF DEFINITION

There is no standard definition of what constitutes abuse of older Canadians. Terms like harm, exploitation, neglect, mistreatment as well as abuse were used by witnesses. While these multiple terms were seen as related, they appeared to have different connotations. It was suggested that abuse involved intent; neglect related to a lack of knowledge of available resources; exploitation was based on greed and a desire to control.¹⁷

Elaine Scott of the Family Violence Prevention Division of Health and Welfare Canada noted that: "There is no universal agreement on what constitutes elder abuse and the absence of a uniform definition has hindered research in the area." She then stated that: "The term elder abuse is generally interpreted to mean harm caused by an abuser to an adult who is vulnerable primarily or partly due to age. The abuse is not limited to physical harm but also includes psychological abuse, financial or material exploitation and neglect of health and personal needs."¹⁸

The problem of defining elder abuse was also highlighted by members of One Voice, The Canadian Seniors Network who noted that: "by no means do Canadians agree on how to define elder abuse or even what it should be called." They presented the following definition for consideration by the Sub-Committee:

Elder abuse is any harm done to an older person that is violent or abusive. Elder abuse is often a crime. The abuse can be caused by: a family member, a friend, staff in group residential settings such as rest and retirement homes, and in long

¹⁷ Dacosta Mason, American Association of Retired People, Presentation to Sub-Committee, Washington, D.C., April 29, 1993.

¹⁸ Elaine Scott, Health and Welfare Canada, Presentation to the Sub-Committee, February 2, 1993, p. 1-2.