

'Big black hole': Elder abuse in region silently growing



Trinette Stevens | 27th Feb 2017 5:00 AM



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New figures show a 19% increase in reported cases of people aged over 65 seeking legal support over the issue.

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IMAGINE reaching your golden years and welcoming a visit from your most beloved family members.

Now imagine them cutting off the oxygen supply to your breathing tube, refusing to stop until you had relinquished both your keycard and your pin number.

This is a real story, as told by Queensland Law Society Elder Law chair Kirsty Mackie, about the horrible reality of elder abuse.

New figures show a 19% increase in reported cases of people aged over 65 seeking legal support over the issue.

The figures, compiled over five years, show older people contacting community legal centres for financial abuse, psychological abuse, neglect and physical abuse.

But Ms Mackie said Central Queensland was a "black hole" on the radar.

"In particular there is a fairly big black hole between Brisbane and Hervey Bay, and Hervey Bay to Townsville," she said.

"When I worked with the seniors' service in Brisbane I would get a lot of telephone inquiries, there was a really big struggle in trying to service the people up in Central Queensland.

"The concern we have raised in submissions to the government is that the Bundaberg and Rockhampton areas have a very high population of over 65s, and these issues just can't be sorted out over the phone."

Figures show those committing acts against the elderly were usually the victim's children, and almost always for financial gain.

"There are three types of financial abuse: selling assets and moving in, misuse of powers of attorney, and the third, which is more prevalent in regional areas, is pension theft," Ms Mackie said.

"You can go to the Centrelink website and you nominate someone, and there are no requirements or checks, so there is a real abuse of people taking a carer's pension and then they become the nominee and siphon that money into their own account," she said.

"The Centrelink issues in the region are a lot more prevalent than they are in the metro areas."

But those reporting elder abuse remain in the minority, with many afraid to lose the relationship with their loved ones.

"This is probably where DV was 25 years ago, all behind closed doors and not talked about," Ms Mackie said.

"I have a lot of clients that come to me and they just want me to hear their story and be validated, but when I give them advice on what to do, they don't want to do it.

"But if I could say one thing it is to speak up. We need to get this out from behind closed doors."

Community Legal Centres Queensland is calling for laws to protect older Queenslanders against elder abuse, including implementing recommendations from the Queensland Law Reform Commission's Review of Guardianship Laws.

It is also calling on the State Government to better fund seniors legal services.



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