



📷 Solicitor Anna Cody and intake and support worker Jane Andreassen from the Townsville Community Legal Service. Picture: Evan Morgan

News

Cash stress gives rise to elder abuse

LUCY SMITH, Townsville Bulletin
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FINANCIAL pressure heading into holiday season can lead to higher numbers of elder abuse, according to a Townsville support worker.

Townsville Community Legal Service's Jane Andreassen provides support to older residents suffering abuse from family members and carers.

She said financial exploitation was one of the most common types of abuse.

"It is hard when you hear about the financial abuse that goes on," she said.

"(There are) elders who invest savings in a granny flat or a unit, they think they're going to live there for the rest of their life, then there's a marriage breakdown and they're told to move out.

“Around Christmas, money is often spent on Christmas presents and that’s when the demands for money can flare up.”

The Townsville Community Legal Service audited 450 elder abuse clients from 2006 to 2016 and found 537 occurrences of financial exploitation and fraud.

The audit also revealed 659 occurrences of psychological abuse – including intimidation, harassment, disrespect and coercion.

Verbal abuse, such as swearing, name-calling and menacing, happened 447 times.

Shockingly, there were 117 cases of physical violence.

Of those, 30 per cent related to property damage, 15 per cent involved hitting or punching, 14 per cent referred to slapping and 13 per cent referred to pushing.

In 3 per cent of cases of physical abuse, a weapon was used.

Ms Andreassen said the data did not show a full picture as many victims do not seek help.

“There’s many reasons why people are concerned or reluctant to get help,” she said.

“Being family, there’s that love for a child. They’re concerned that they will no longer have a relationship with them.

“There’s situations where threats are used (such as) ‘If you don’t provide me with this money, we’ll stop allowing you to see your grandchildren’.”

TCLS data shows the largest number of elder abuse perpetrators are daughters (21 per cent), followed by sons (17 per cent).

Five per cent of perpetrators are sons-in-law and the figure is the same for daughters-in-law.

The audit also showed the majority of victims were women, and of all victims, 71 per cent had a disability.

Ms Andreassen said in many cases, older residents did not recognise abuse.

TCLS receives government funding for a lawyer and a support worker to assist elders over 60, or indigenous elders over 50.

The team can assist with legal advice, housing issues and protection orders.