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Gold Coast elderly abuse some of worst in Queensland, according to Elder Abuse Prevention Unit

This South East Queensland region's rate of abuse against elderly people is one of the highest totals in Queensland, shocking figures reveal — and the abuse takes many forms, not just violence.

Chris McMahon, Gold Coast Bulletin

 Subscriber only | June 10, 2019 12:12pm



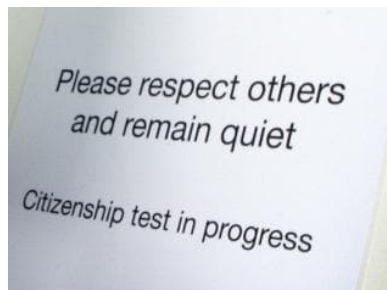
The federal government has unveiled a free national hotline, to combat abuse against elderly A...

THE Gold Coast has the second highest total rate of abuse against elderly people in Queensland, shocking figures reveal — and the abuse takes many forms not just violence.

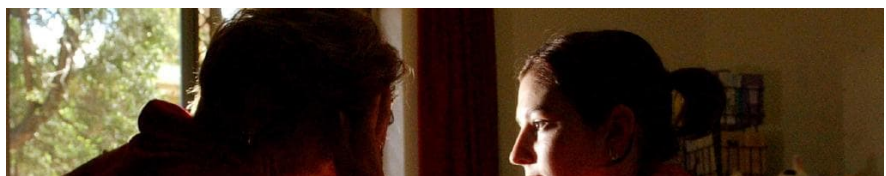
One of every ten victims of elder abuse in Queensland come from the Gold Coast — 12.6 per cent of the state's total victims, according to a report by the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit. The Gold Coast Community Legal Centre (GCCLC) deals with between 10 to 15 cases of abuse each week.

In the last year alone the organisation has handled 128 cases involving violence, of which 78 of the victims were women.

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📷 The Gold Coast has highest rate of reported elder abuse in state.

The GCCLC recently became part of a statewide network to provide support for those experiencing elder abuse and within that network, they top Queensland in both reporting of and incidences of elder abuse. The Coast also makes the highest volume of calls to the statewide elder abuse hotline.

GCCLC director Victoria Shiel said in the past 12 months they have seen a rise in the complexity and urgency of their elder abuse casework, with the abuse taking many forms.

“Children or in-laws might feel entitled to family money and misuse a Power of Attorney,” Ms Shiel said.



📷 “Seniors might be denied basic services or medical care by family.”
Picture: iStock

“Or seniors might be denied basic services or medical care by family.

“We also see lots of adult children denying their parents access to their grandchildren unless they give money to the family.”

Ms Shiel said her organisation was fearful of being able to meet the surging demand, as the population continued to grow.

The number of Gold Coasters aged 65 plus is predicted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to double by 2031.

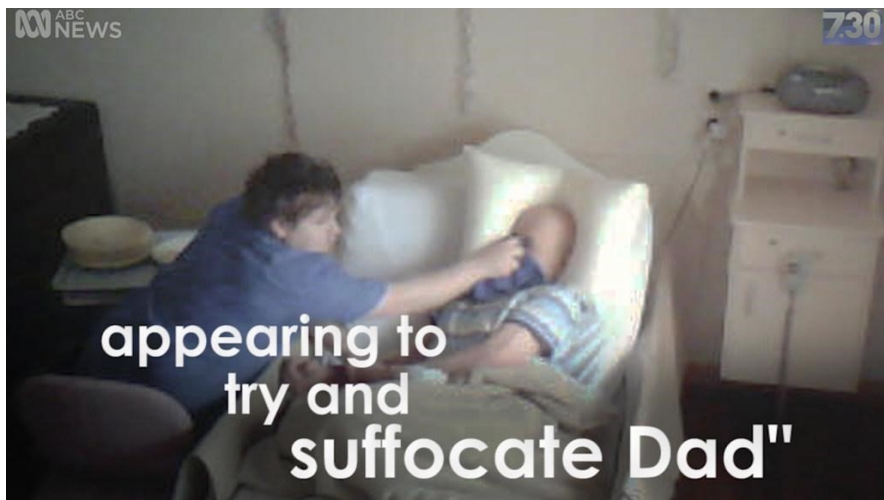
“As reporting of the problem increases and becomes more accepted in the community, we think the floodgates will open,” says Ms Shiel.

Elder abuse was largely under-reported due to compounding family and social factors, she said.

“Elder abuse is still hidden and dramatically under-reported as a significant issue in the same way domestic violence has been in the past.

“People are today more willing to report domestic violence and access support but victims of elder abuse are still reluctant to come forwards or to act on advice.”

Ms Shiel said the “insidious” nature of elder abuse kept victims silent and fearful of reporting abusers from within their own family.



WARNING DISTURBING FOOTAGE. Hidden camera footage shows nursing home staff member appearing to ...

“Victims think reporting the abuse could mean the destruction of their family network or losing crucial support from family caregivers,” she says.

“When a family member or caregiver is the perpetrator, it limits someone’s willingness to report out of fear of consequences within the extended family network or a loss of care.”

Ms Shiel said the Gold Coast was working hard to come up with an integrated response to helping people through elder abuse cases.

“The legal side of things is just one part of the jigsaw, the Gold Coast has an interactive model of different service providers, so we’re trying to make sure that no door is the wrong door as well.

“If they ring us and we think it is something that might need mediation, or might need financial counselling, we’ll refer to that, so the Coast is trying to come up with an integrated response.

“I think once people start speaking up about elder abuse, there will be more reporting, they’ll feel safer about it.”

CASE STUDIES

*A grandfather who had a close relationship with his grandchildren was cut off from

seeing them unless he paid money to the parents.

Financially tapped out, he was cut off and suffered loneliness, social isolation and distress.

He also had to manage debt incurred paying to see his grandchildren.

Gold Coast Community Legal Centre coordinated mediation, which failed. The situation was

resolved by a court order to see his grandchildren, gained by GCCLC.

*A man was co-habiting with his elderly aunt and physically and emotionally abusing her

over a long period of time and isolating her from peers and other family members.

Her lack of computer literacy and inability to drive made her especially vulnerable.

She approached Gold Coast Community Legal Centre, who provided her several pathways

to resolve the situation. She was fearful of reporting her nephew, however, due to her

reliance on him for shopping and daily care around the house. She chose not to act.

*An elderly Gold Coast man remarried late in life.

His new wife's family began spending time at his house and gradually exerting control over

him and withdrawing money from his accounts and removing his items from the home.

Eventually they locked him out of his own house, leaving him homeless for a period of time

and without access to his medications or belongings.

He reported the situation to the Gold Coast Community Legal Centre, who obtained a domestic violence court order allowing him to get him back into the home and gave him

referrals to support services for his daily needs.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Elder Abuse Helpline — 1300 651 192

Police — 000 or 131 444

Gold Coast Community Legal Centre — 5532 9611

Relationships Australia — 1300 063 232

Lifeline — 13114



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