

Laurie Salvador

Elder Abuse in our Communities:

First of a Series



recently attended the International Elder Law Conference in Vancouver.

One of the most pertinent sessions for me was on Elder Abuse.

Every professional—including Notaries, lawyers, bankers, Realtors, and investment advisors, in particular—must be well informed about this topic.

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse occurs when someone does something, intentionally or unintentionally, that causes harm to another person who is over the age of 60. While my emphasis for this article

is on the senior, abuse does not have age limits; it affects everyone.

Elder abuse comes in many forms.

Emotional abuse wears the victim down over time, until the victim has lost her self-esteem, her perspective, and her soul.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse

The second-most common form of this abuse is verbal, in most cases, perpetrated by the spouse. It usually takes place in private, over a long period of time. In some cases, it escalates to physical or sexual abuse. Although there may be little evidence of the abuse—no bruises, broken bones, or scars, its impact on the victim is devastating.

Emotional abuse wears the victim down over time, until the victim has lost her self-esteem, her perspective, and her soul. The abuser may make sarcastic remarks and hurtful and

demeaning statements. The victim experiences intimidation and constant criticism often guised as a “joke.” Other indicators are name-calling, humiliation, insults, tantrums, and bullying, until the victim eventually takes responsibility for the bad behaviour of the abuser by making excuses for him—or she learns to accept it.

It is not uncommon for the abuser to isolate the victim from family and friends. The abuser will ensure that social agencies and other professionals are not able to speak to the victim in private.

In older couples, it is common that the victim remains in the home, sequestered to a lifetime of being on the receiving end of badgering and bickering. Often in these cases, the wife stayed at home to raise their children and by the time she might have been ready to re-enter the workforce, the husband’s income and ego were sufficient that it was not “necessary” for her to seek work outside the home.

I have observed that the abused person often takes on similar behaviour patterns to the abuser, probably as a defence mechanism. One starts the bickering and the other retaliates. An excellent example of this caustic type of relationship is the TV



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couple Frank and Marie, on *Everybody Loves Raymond*. I am never sure which one is the abuser, since they both have their ways of undermining and demeaning each other.

Then there is Tony Soprano of the *Sopranos*—a classic emotional and psychological abuser. All of Tony's relatives, including his mob family, are terrified of doing anything that may displease him. After many years of his lies and cheating, his wife Carmella finally got up the courage to insist Tony leave "his" home after one of his girlfriends called to inform her of his latest affair. We were all cheering for Carmella that night! And wouldn't you know it, after a short period of separation, she happily took him back when he promised that his mid-life crisis activities would never be visited on her again! Yeah, right, Tony.

In younger generations, the victim is usually able to come to terms with the abuse and get out of the situation, even though it may mean a few lean and difficult years. Unlike the 1950s and '60s, today many services are available to safeguard a person (and the children) during this difficult transition. ▲

More in the next issue . . .

If you know someone who needs help, please contact one of these organizations.

VictimLINK

BC Toll Free: **1 800-563-0808**

Hours: 24 hours, 7 days a week

For deaf or hard of hearing callers:

TTY 604 875-0885 (collect calls accepted) or Text **604 836-6381**

<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/isv/victims.htm>

BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors (BC CEAS)

Voice: **604 437-1940**

www.bcceas.ca

edcrns@telus.net

www.bccrns.ca

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