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**An Empirical Examination of Elder Abuse:**  
**A Review of files from the Elder Abuse Section**  
**of the Ottawa Police Service**

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and  
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**2013**

*The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice Canada.*



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## 1.0 Background

According to the 2011 Census, there are close to 5 million Canadians aged 65 and older (this demographic group is commonly referred to as seniors or elderly persons), growing 14% since 2006. A higher proportion of this demographic group is female. The proportion of Canadians over age 65 is expected to double from 13% of Canadians in 2001 to 25% over the next 25 years.<sup>1</sup> This demographic change will impact many segments of Canada's public policy and social welfare structures, including the criminal justice system. For example, the proportion of both elderly victims of crime and offenders is predicted to increase over the next few years.<sup>2</sup>

Although there is not one universally accepted definition of elder abuse, most definitions take into account the existence of a relationship between the abuser and the abused. The World Health Organization (WHO) definition, introduced in 2002, is one of the most widely recognised. The WHO describes elder abuse as "...a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person."<sup>3</sup> Generally elder abuse refers to adults over 65; however, most elder abuse policies note that this term may be used for younger adults, particularly if the adult has reduced capacity or competence related to aging.

In Canada, constitutional jurisdiction in the area of elder abuse is shared between the provincial/territorial and federal governments, with programs and services primarily within provincial and territorial jurisdiction. There are certain categories of abuse, such as fraud, assault, sexual assault, uttering threats and criminal harassment, which are crimes under the *Criminal Code*. Some types of abuse and/or neglect are also offences under provincial and territorial legislation. The *Criminal Code* also includes a provision (section 718.2) that requires the court, when delivering a sentence, to take into account evidence that the offence was motivated by age- or disability-based bias, prejudice or hate, and whether, in committing the offence, the offender abused and/or neglected a position of trust or authority.

Seniors may be more vulnerable to particular types of crimes, such as telemarketing or internet fraud, misuse of power of attorney, and home renovation fraud. For example, findings from Project PhoneBusters<sup>4</sup> suggest that between 1996 and 2003, 84% of the total dollar loss through telemarketing prize and lottery occurrence was accounted for by victims 60 years and older.<sup>5</sup> In addition, 2009 police-reported data from Statistics Canada show that the rate of family violence against seniors has increased over the past several years, up 14% since 2004 (when the data became available). In 2009, 35% of senior victims of violent crime were victimized by a family

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<sup>1</sup> Ogrodnik, L. (2007). *Seniors as Victims of Crime: 2004 and 2005*. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Bomba, P. (2006). Use of a Single Page Elder Abuse Assessment and Management Tool: A Practical Clinician's Approach to Identifying Elder Mistreatment. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 46, No. 3/4, pp. 103-122.

<sup>3</sup> From WHO website: [http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder\\_abuse/en/](http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/en/) ; last accessed June 8, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> This program is based on the collaborative efforts of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Competition Bureau Canada.

<sup>5</sup> Ogrodnik, L. (2007). *Seniors as Victims of Crime: 2004 and 2005*. Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

member and another 35% were victimized by a friend or acquaintance.<sup>6</sup> There are studies that also show that elderly persons are at increased risk of abuse and/or neglect from their caregivers in institutional settings.<sup>7</sup>

Professionals who work with abused older adults and researchers who specialize in gerontological issues have also highlighted the dramatic ways in which elder mistreatment can affect the health, safety and quality of life of older people. Elder abuse can have potentially devastating effects on the lives of older adults. Injuries sustained by a frail older adult can have much more tragic consequences than similar injuries inflicted on a younger person. Physical abuse can result in nursing home placement, permanent disability or even death. Financial exploitation can deprive older adults of resources needed for the necessities of life. Unlike younger people who lose assets or resources, older adults have less time and opportunity to recover from financial losses. An unexpected finding of a longitudinal study published in 1998 was that older adults who have been subjected to any form of mistreatment are three times more likely to die within three years than elders of similar age and medical and social circumstances who have not been mistreated.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the increased proportion of elderly persons in the criminal justice system, either as victims or offenders, various initiatives have been undertaken. For example, the Correctional Service of Canada opened its first Elder Division in 2001.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, police departments have created programs or sections that focus on elder abuse and/or neglect. For example, the Ottawa Police Service created an Elder Abuse Section in 2005 in order to investigate all allegations of elder abuse and vulnerable adult abuse when it involves a person in a position of trust, which is consistent with the definition employed by the WHO.

More recently, in May 2007, the Government of Canada created a National Seniors Council to give advice to the Government on matters of national importance to seniors. In addition, Bill C-36, Protecting Canada's Seniors Act, came into force in early 2013. The bill "better protects seniors by ensuring tougher sentences for those who take advantage of elderly Canadians." The amendments specify that "evidence that an offence had a significant impact on the victims due to their age – and other personal circumstances such as their health or financial situation – will now be considered an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. 2011. Family Violence in Canada: A statistical profile. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-224-X. Ottawa. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2010000-eng.pdf> (accessed July 14, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Dubble, C. (2006). A Policy Perspective on Elder Justice through APS and Law Enforcement Collaboration. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 46, No. 3/4, pp. 35-55.

Podnieks, E. (2006). Social Inclusion: An Interplay of the Determinants of Health – New Insights into Elder Abuse. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Vol. 46, No. 3/4, pp. 57-79.

<sup>8</sup> Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc. Weill Cornell Medical Center of Cornell University,

New York City, Department for the Aging (2011). *Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study*.

<sup>9</sup> Gallagher, E. (2001). Elders in Prison: Health and Well-Being of Older Inmates. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, Vol. 24, pp. 325-333.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Justice Canada, "Legislation protecting Canada's seniors comes into force," News release, Etobicoke, 14 January 2013. [http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2013/doc\\_32825.html](http://canada.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2013/doc_32825.html) (accessed January 21, 2013).

## 1.1 Ottawa Police Elder Abuse Section

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) was one of the first police forces in Canada to establish a specialized Elder Abuse Section in 2005. The mandate of the section is two-fold: to investigate all allegations of elder or vulnerable adult abuse where there is a relationship of trust/dependence between the victim and abuser, and to work with front-line service providers to educate them and the public to help raise awareness of elder abuse and support for seniors. In addition, the section works closely with the Ottawa Police Victim Crisis Unit which provides counseling and resources to victims both throughout and following a police investigation.<sup>11</sup>

The elder abuse section adopts a specialized approach when dealing with elderly victims. This includes wearing plain clothes and using an unmarked vehicle when investigating incidents; and exploring alternative solutions, which often involves coordinating police involvement with appropriate health, social and community service agencies.

## 1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to review case files from the Elder Abuse Section in order to examine the extent and nature of incidents involving elderly victims that are reported to the police. This research project also reviews the outcomes of cases from the Elder Abuse Section involving elder abuse that move through the criminal justice system.

### 1.2.1 Research Questions

- What are the characteristics of cases involving elder abuse that come to the attention of the Elder Abuse Section of the Ottawa Police Service?
  - Who are the accused and victims? What are the demographics of the accused and elderly victims?
  - What is the nature of the abuse? What types of charges are laid, and are any alternatives to charging being used?
- What are some of the challenges police face when investigating elder abuse and/or neglect cases?
- What are the outcomes (where recorded) of the elder abuse and/or neglect cases that come to the attention of the Elder Abuse Section of the Ottawa Police Service (referrals to support services, police, Crown and Court's response)?

## 2.0 Methodology

This research involved a manual file review of cases from the OPS Elder Abuse Section. The intent was to review all files from the inception of the section in 2005 until the time of data coding in spring 2010. Ultimately, a sample of 531 files was obtained. This sample is sufficiently large to be representative of all files investigated by the Elder Abuse Section during the study period.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/ServingOttawa/SectionsAndUnits/Elder\\_abuse.aspx](http://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/ServingOttawa/SectionsAndUnits/Elder_abuse.aspx) (accessed January 21, 2013).

To facilitate data collection, a standardized coding sheet was developed by researchers from the Research and Statistics Division in collaboration with policy counsel from the Family, Children and Youth Section at the Department of Justice, as well as with officers from the Ottawa Police Service. A data coding contractor was hired to code electronic data extracted from the Ottawa Police Service electronic data system onto the standardized coding sheets. The data coder obtained security clearance with the Ottawa Police Service in order to gain access to the files. There were no ethical concerns with the project, as it involved analysis of secondary data and no personal identifiers were collected. Data was transferred from the coding sheets into a statistical program for analysis.

In addition, one semi-structured interview with two officers from the OPS Elder Abuse Section was conducted in the fall of 2011. The purpose of this interview was to better understand how the Elder Abuse Section works, in terms of handling investigations and the challenges officers face in dealing with elder abuse cases. Participants were asked a series of questions in order to guide the interview.

### **3.0 Results**

As noted there were a total of 531 files examined for the study. Several files that were deemed not to fit the definition of elder abuse were excluded, as were several files that did not contain sufficient information for analysis. Taking into account those exclusions, the total number of files analyzed was 453.

In the following pages, the results of the analysis are presented. They are broken down into several sections starting with a profile of victims, a profile of those accused of elder abuse, and ending with details of investigations and case outcomes. Qualitative information from the interview with officers is included where appropriate throughout the analysis.

#### **3.1 Profile of Victims**

The majority of victims were female (70%) and Caucasian (93%). In addition, most victims were either widowed (69%) or married (20%) and the vast majority had children (98%). The average age of victims at the time of investigation was 80 (median age 81); while the minimum age was 49 and the maximum was 101.<sup>12</sup> While a large proportion of victims lived in a private home or apartment (58%), a substantial number were residents of nursing homes or long-term care facilities (42%).

There were nine cases that involved more than one victim; however, for most of these there was only detailed information on file about one of the victims. Of these nine cases the number of victims ranged from 4 to 67, with an average number of 19.

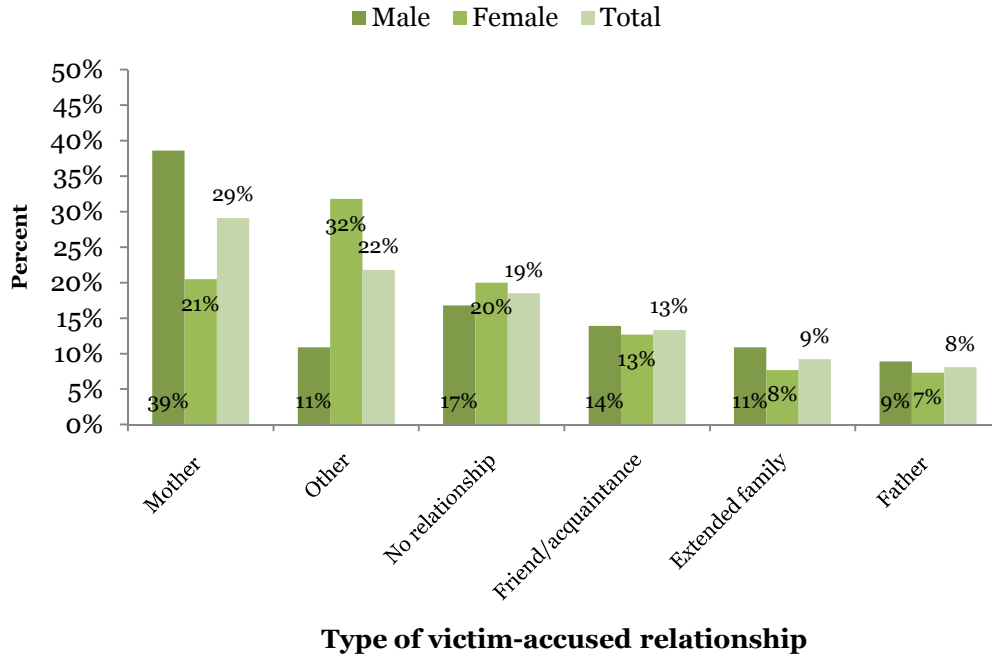
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<sup>12</sup> Age was unknown in 15 cases (3%)



Data on the relationship between the victim and accused showed some interesting differences between men and women. Overall, mothers were the most common victims (28%) followed by “no relationship”<sup>x</sup> (22%) and “other”<sup>t</sup> (18%). However, when broken down by sex, the data show that male accused were statistically significantly more likely to victimize family or friends, while female accused more often victimized those they cared for in a professional setting (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: OPS Elder Abuse cases - Victim relationship to accused by sex of accused, 2005-2010**



**N=422,  $\chi^2 = 38.703$ , p=.000**

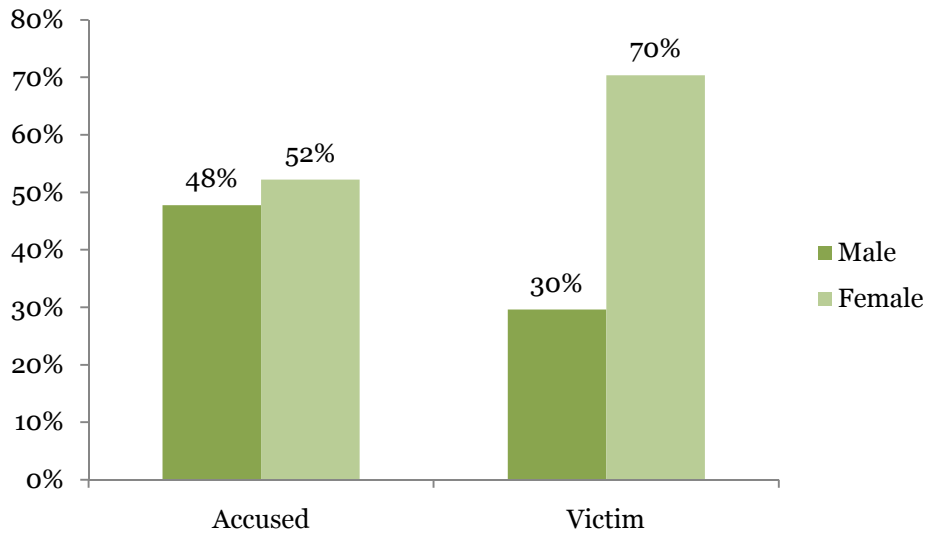
<sup>t</sup> Other includes – paid home nurse, personal support worker, roommate, hospital nurse, etc.

<sup>x</sup> “no relationship” includes cases where an institution was being investigated for abuse.

### 3.2 Profile of Accused

Figure 2 shows the proportion of accused and victims by sex. For the accused, there was almost an even split, with slightly more female accused than males. In contrast, more than two thirds of victims were female.

**Figure 2: OPS Elder Abuse Cases – Proportion of accused and victims by sex, 2005-2010**



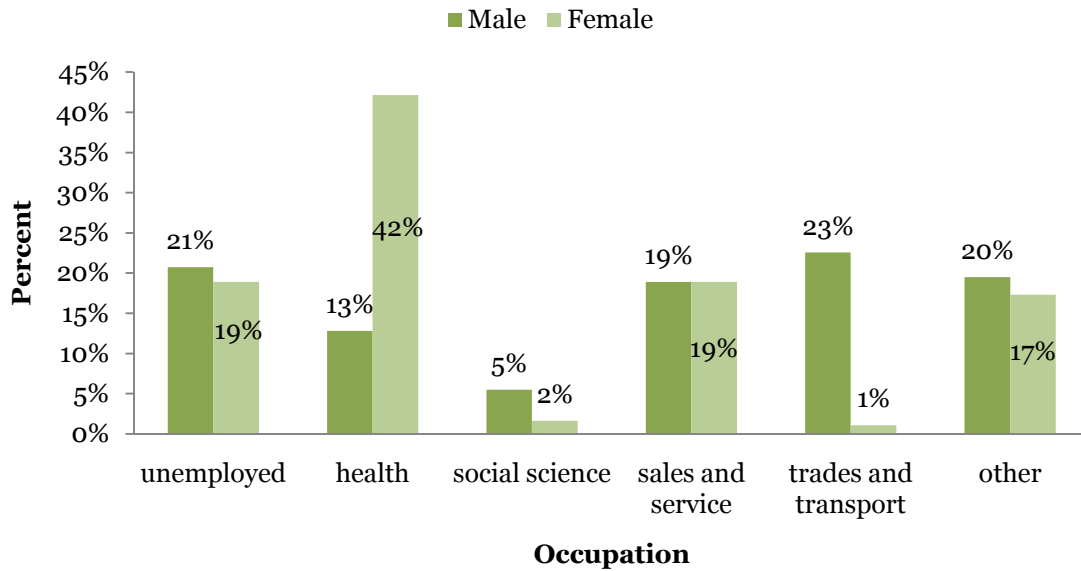
The average age of accused in the year the case was investigated was 48 (median age 47). The age range was large, with the youngest accused being 17 years old and the oldest 89 years old.<sup>13</sup> The majority of accused were Caucasian (80%), 10% were black and 8% were Asian (south, east or west Asian). Almost half were single (43%), and 29% were married. A substantial proportion of the accused lived in a private home or apartment (88%), with the next highest proportion living in a nursing home or long-term care facility (6%) and 4% had no fixed address.

Figure 3 shows the most common occupation of the accused broken down by sex. Female accused were statistically significantly more likely to work in health-related occupations (42% versus 18%), while males were more likely to be in trades and transport (23% versus 1%).

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<sup>13</sup> Age was unknown for 74 accused (16%)

**Figure 3: OPS Elder Abuse Cases - Occupation of the accused by sex, 2005-2010**



**N=349,  $\chi^2 = 66.462$ ,  $p = .000$**

Data were also collected on the mental health status of the accused, as well as any indication of a history of drug or alcohol abuse. A small proportion of accused were flagged as having a history of alcohol (15%)<sup>14</sup> or drug abuse (16%)<sup>15</sup>, while 8% had both. Thirteen percent of accused were suspected to have mental health problems.<sup>16</sup> There were no significant differences in the occurrence of substance abuse or mental illness between males and females.

During the semi-structured interview officers from the Elder Abuse Section reported that in cases where the accused is a family member and suffers from mental health and drug or alcohol issues the victim is often reluctant to lay charges. In these cases, officers spend the majority of their time setting up social services referrals for both the victim and accused, rather than investigating the criminal aspects of the case. As one officer stated:

There is police persona attached to this work but that is not accurate in that the work we do is social work related because of the nature of the dynamics between the elderly and their care-givers or family members. If the victim is over 65 and if there is a relationship between the victim and abuser the elder abuse section is responsible for investigating and we end up investigating all forms of abuse, for example, physical, financial, psychological abuse, abuse in retirement/nursing homes, issues of neglect. We are juggling all these forms of abuse and this work is very, very time consuming. It takes several weeks or months to investigate an elder abuse case and there is no cookie-cutter method of investigating elder abuse.

<sup>14</sup> This information was unknown in 55 cases (12%)

<sup>15</sup> This information was unknown in 54 cases (12%)

<sup>16</sup> This information was unknown in 49 cases (11%)

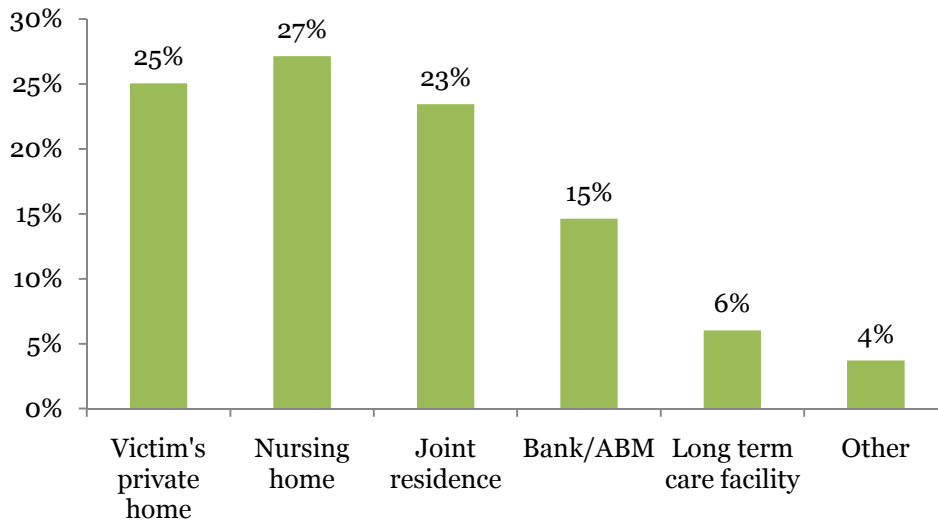
Files were also examined to determine if there had been a history of family violence in any of the cases of elder abuse (e.g., the elderly victim had been an abusive parent to the accused). Only one file showed a history of family violence. In the majority of files this information was not available (or not applicable). In addition, files were examined to determine if there was a power of attorney in place. Records showed the accused had power of attorney over the victim in 14% of cases.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3 Characteristics of Incidents

In over half of cases, there was a single incident being investigated (57%).<sup>18</sup> In almost a quarter (23%) of cases, there were two incidents being investigated, and in 9% of cases there were three incidents. In a small proportion of cases (5 out of 333) there were a substantial number of incidents, ranging from 10 to a high of 60 incidents. Of the cases that involved more than one incident, the timeframe of the reported abuse was typically less than a year. Almost a third spanned less than six months (27%), while 12% spanned six months to a year, and 13% spanned more than a year.

Figure 4 shows the locations of the incidents being investigated. The highest proportion of incidents took place at a nursing home (27%) followed by the victim's private residence (25%) and a joint residence occupied by the victim and accused (23%). In the majority of cases (80%), there were no witnesses to the alleged incident(s).

**Figure 4: OPS Elder Abuse Cases - Location of alleged incident, 2005-2010**



**N= 431, Other includes: hospital and workplace**

<sup>17</sup> This information was unknown in 34 cases (8%)

<sup>18</sup> the number of incidents was unknown in 120 cases (27%)

Figure 5 details the type of abuse investigated, broken down by the sex of the victim. Overall, the most common type of abuse was financial (62%) with men being victimized more often than women. Within the category of financial abuse, there were two sub-categories – abuse where the victim was unaware and abuse by threats or intimidation. In almost half of cases victims were unaware that the financial abuse was occurring (48%). In a quarter of cases the financial abuse was done through threats or intimidation (25%), while the remaining cases of financial abuse were done via other means (26%). The most common scenarios under the ‘other’ category were the accused accepting large sums of money as gifts, failing to pay a victim’s rent and expenses, and stolen property (e.g., jewellery, money out of wallets, pension cheques).

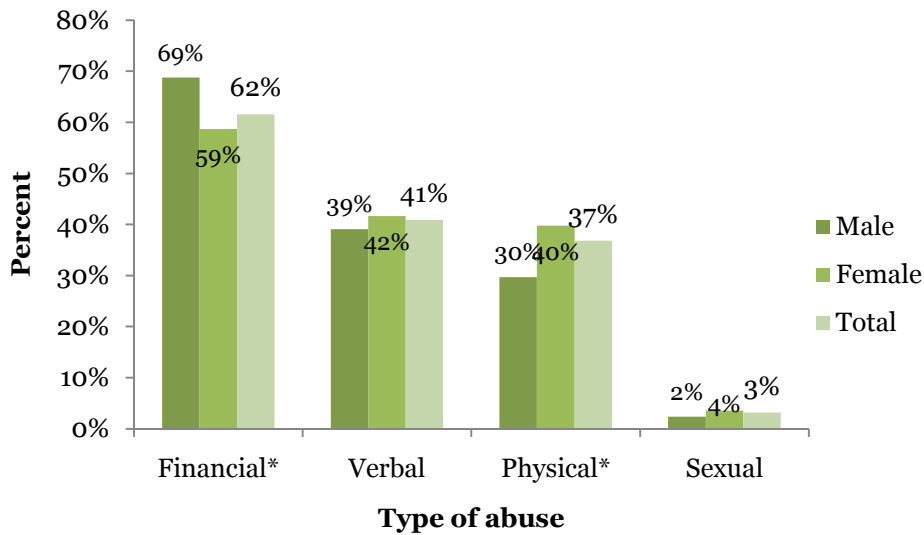
The interviews revealed that in cases of financial abuse, abuse of power of attorney or abuse by a substitute decision-maker is common. Often, issues of privacy impede the officers’ abilities to gather pertinent information, particularly from banks, integral to investigations of alleged financial abuse. As one officer related, “I worked on a financial elder abuse case where the bank watched the depletion of three savings accounts to the tune of \$1.2 million and did nothing to stop it. The banks were not willing to share information because of privacy concerns. It requires time, persistence and creativity to investigate each of these cases.”

The next most common type of cases investigated were allegations of verbal abuse (41%), with women being victimized only slightly more often than men. Physical abuse was present in 37% of cases, with women being victimized more often (40% vs. 30%). Among cases of physical abuse that were investigated, 39% of victims received minor, untreated injuries, while 19% were treated and released, and 3% required a more extended stay in hospital (37% reported no injuries).<sup>19</sup> Sexual abuse made up a very small proportion of the incidents investigated (3%), with women being victimized more often than men.

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<sup>19</sup> There were 4 cases that involved the death of an elderly person. No criminal charges were laid in any of these incidents.

**Figure 5: OPS Elder Abuse Cases - Type of abuse by sex of victim, 2005-2010**



N=440, \* = p<.05

Table 1 shows the type of abuse broken down by the relationship between victim and accused. These data show that family and friends/acquaintances were more often victims of financial abuse, while those in non-familial relationships suffered physical abuse more often. While parents were victims of verbal abuse most often, the prevalence of verbal abuse in non-family relationships was also relatively high.

**Table 1: Type of abuse by victim-accused relationship<sup>20</sup>**

	Victim relationship with accused						Total
	No relationship	Mother	Father	Extended family	Friend/acquaintance	Other	
Financial Abuse	34 (35%)	88 (73%)	25 (74%)	29 (78%)	48 (87%)	48 (62%)	272
Physical Abuse	56 (58%)	40 (33%)	10 (29%)	11 (30%)	3 (6%)	37 (48%)	157
Sexual Abuse	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	0 (--)	0 (--)	5 (9%)	4 (5%)	13
Verbal Abuse	32 (33%)	76 (63%)	17 (50%)	12 (32%)	10 (18%)	31 (40%)	178

In 37% of cases, there was more than one type of abuse associated with the investigation. Of these, 83% involved two of the four types of abuse, and 17% involved three of the four types. There were no cases that involved all four types of abuse.

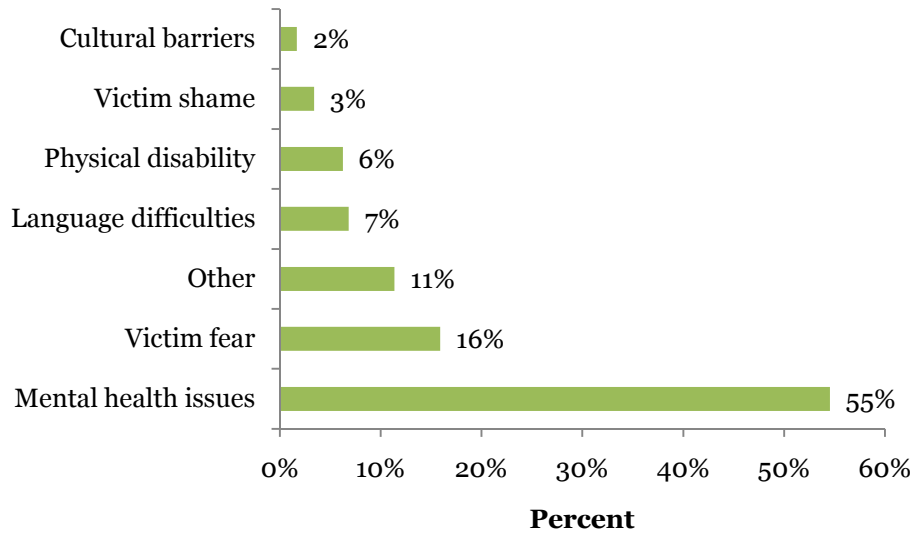
### 3.4 Characteristics of Investigations

Files were examined to determine if there were any barriers identified by police during the course of their investigations. In about half of cases, there were no barriers identified. Of those cases that did have barriers, mental health issues were the most commonly identified (55%), followed by victim fear in 16% of cases (Figure 6). Of the cases that were identified as having

<sup>20</sup> Column percentages total more than 100% due to multiple responses for abuse categories

mental health barriers, in almost three quarters of these cases, dementia or Alzheimer's were identified. Other barriers identified by police included the victim being deceased, or the victim being paralyzed or otherwise immobile.

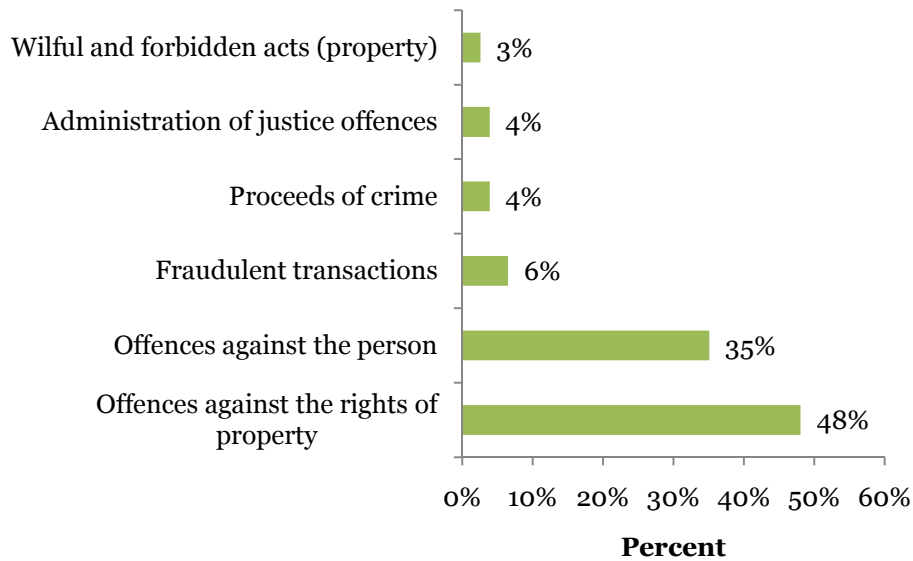
**Figure 6: OPS Elder Abuse Cases – Police-identified barriers to the investigation, 2005-2010**



N=176

Out of the 453 files analysed, charges were laid in 77, or 17% of cases. Figure 7 outlines the most serious offences by broad categories, showing that almost half of cases (48%) involved offences against the rights of property. Looking at the specific offences within those broader categories, the most serious offence was most often fraud (steal, forge, possess or using a credit card) in 16% of cases, followed by assault level I (14%).

**Figure 7: OPS Elder Abuse Cases – Most Serious Offence Category, 2005-2010**



N=77

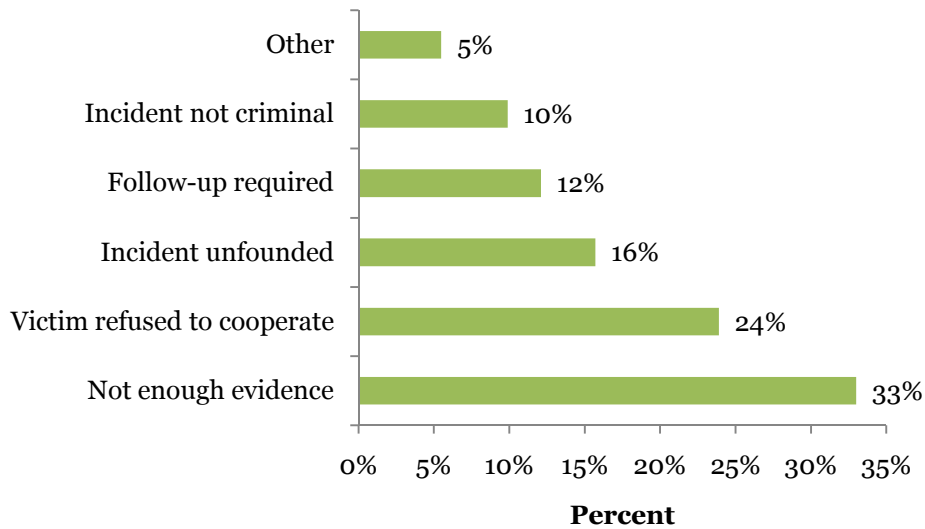
Of those cases where charges were not laid, the most common reason was a lack of evidence (33%). In almost a quarter of cases, the victim refused to cooperate with police (Figure 8). Officers noted that maintaining family relationships, fears and anxieties about institutionalization and loss of independence, factors including financial dependency, disability or illness are all possible explanations for the small proportion of elder abuse cases resulting in charges. One officer stated:

The elderly are hesitant to lay charges against their children and as a result police spend a large amount of time walking elders through the importance of reporting the abuse and the benefits of accessing available services available to children who are abusive.

Additionally, the officers indicated that because the elderly are hesitant to report incidents of abuse the officers often must, “rely on information from a third party, who is not attached to the situation.” Officers indicate this process is time consuming as all information must be verified before it is deemed reliable.



**Figure 8: OPS Elder Abuse Cases – Reason no charges were laid, 2005-2010**



**N=364, Other includes: incident resolved**

In cases where no charges were laid and other specific actions were taken, police referred the victim to social services (48%), victim services or other support groups (11%) (Table 2).

**Table 2: Other action taken by police**

	# of cases	Percent of total
Referred to other social services	67	48%
Other	58	41%
Referred to victim services, support groups	15	11%
Total	140	100.0%

Other includes: verbal warning to accused, civil or POA advice provided, safety advice provided  
 N/A = 297, missing= 16

Of the cases where charges were laid, the vast majority (96%) went to court (2 out of 75 did not, 1 was stayed).<sup>21</sup> Table 3 shows the outcome of cases that went to court. Over half (65%) of accused plead guilty or were found guilty following trial.

<sup>21</sup> Out of the 77 cases where charges were laid, this information was unknown in 2 cases

**Table 3: Court case outcomes**

	# of cases	Percent of total
Guilty following trial	36	58%
Withdrawn	14	23%
Dismissed	5	8%
Accused plead guilty	4	7%
Stay	2	3%
Not guilty	1	2%
Total	62	100.0%

15 missing or unknown

Of the 40 offenders who plead guilty or were found guilty, the majority received probation (22/40 cases), followed by custody (9/40) and a conditional sentence (6/40). One of these offenders received a conditional discharge and one received an intermittent sentence.<sup>22</sup> In addition, a total of 13 peace bonds were handed out for those cases that were stayed, withdrawn or dismissed (11 of these peace bonds were for withdrawn cases).

#### 4.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this analysis reveal some general trends with regards to the characteristics of cases that were investigated between 2005 and 2010. Notably, there were slightly more women accused of elder abuse than men (52% female vs. 48% male). This is in contrast to the most recent Statistics Canada data on female offending, which shows that in 2009 females accounted for less than a quarter (22%) of adult accused (those accused of all types of offences).<sup>23</sup>

Among victims, females represented a higher proportion than males (70% female). This is in contrast to police-reported data on victims of crime, which show that in 2010 females represented about half of victims (victims of all types of crime).<sup>24</sup> This finding is likely related to the fact that women make up a disproportionate proportion of the senior population (particularly among the oldest age groups). In fact, census data from 2006 show that women accounted for almost 69% of persons aged 85 or older, while they accounted for 58% of those 75 to 84 and 52% of persons aged 65 to 74. In addition, research indicates that men underreport elder abuse for a number of reasons. These include: men do not view themselves as victims; shame; they wish to stay with the family; and men tend to be abandoned more than women.<sup>25</sup>

Notably, only a small proportion of cases investigated by the Ottawa Police resulted in charges (17%). This is compared to Statistics Canada data on the number of cases investigated by police

<sup>22</sup> The sentence was unknown in one case.

<sup>23</sup> Hotton Mahony, Tina. 2011. Women and the Criminal Justice System. Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-503-X, Women in Canada: A sex-based statistical report.

<sup>24</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2010 (data representing adult victims of *Criminal Code* non-traffic offences)

<sup>25</sup> Bergeron, L. Rene. (2001), An elder abuse case study, *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 34 (4) 47.

cleared by charge in 2010 (26%).<sup>26</sup> Officers working in the field have found that maintaining family relationships, fears and anxieties about institutionalization and loss of independence, factors including financial dependency, disability and or illness are all factors that may provide possible explanations for the small proportion of cases resulting in charges. Also, the nature of many elder abuse incidents is such that criminal charges are not appropriate or applicable (e.g., accused accepting large amounts of money as gifts). It is also important to note that the strategy employed by the Elder Abuse Section to focus first and foremost on the needs of the victim (e.g., referrals to community services) may also contribute to low number of charges being laid.

This study highlights the importance obtaining of data on the reasons why charges were not laid in cases of elder abuse, and what actions police took as an alternative to charging. In many cases charges were not laid due to a lack of evidence and/or a refusal of the victim to cooperate with police. In addition, police files indicated that in half of cases there were barriers to the investigations, many of which are characteristic of elder abuse cases (e.g., mental health issues, physical disabilities). Records also indicate that police are making many referrals to community-based services and supports, as well as providing safety and other advice to victims.

This research provides valuable insight into the characteristics of cases brought to the attention of the Ottawa police. The vulnerabilities that put older Canadians at risk of victimization can also create barriers to criminal investigations and the criminal justice system as a response. Further research delving into the barriers facing police in investigating cases of elder abuse would be beneficial, as police face unique challenges in these types of cases. For example, adding a full-time elder abuse specialist on police staff may alleviate barriers to criminal investigations and, at the same time, free up officers to investigate the criminal aspects of elder abuse cases. Another example would be ensuring resource agencies and programs that provide support and assistance to elderly victims are well resourced. A replication of this study in other dedicated elder abuse police units across the country would be beneficial to understanding if these trends are unique to Ottawa or common to elder abuse cases in other jurisdictions.

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<sup>26</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2010.