

QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE – ELDER ABUSE OFFICER

KERRY MCKAY*

With an ageing population, and the emergence of a new phenomenon commonly referred to as ‘inheritance impatience’, the problem of elder abuse is sadly on the rise.

In response, the Queensland Police Service has appointed a senior project officer to work with frontline officers and partner agencies to raise awareness of elder abuse and promote initiatives to address it.

Acting Senior Sergeant Kerry McKay is the Service’s Elder Abuse Officer, attached to the Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit, located at Police HQ Brisbane.

Elder abuse can take on different forms such as financial abuse, threats, intimidation, and sometimes even physical assaults on the elder person. Perpetrators of such abuse are often a family member, such as an adult son or daughter.

Financial abuse being the most common form of elder abuse identified, can be anything from transferring ownership of the family home for no payment to forcing someone to change their enduring power of attorney or forcing them to guarantee a loan or mortgage.

And then there is ‘inheritance impatience’, where a family member decides to help themselves to the older person’s money or possessions in the belief that they are going to eventually inherit them anyway.

Elder abuse is believed to be one of the most under-reported of all domestic and family violence relationships as victims of such abuse are typically isolated from community, family and friends. Many victims of elder abuse fear speaking out as they are concerned about retaliation and repercussions from the family member, and others may not even realise that they are in an elder abuse relationship simply because this is their norm.

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The Queensland Police Service is bringing this subject to the forefront through education of the public and police officers, ensuring that they are talking about the issue, recognising the signs of elder abuse, and appropriately attempting to deal with this delicate issue, often linking the victims to referral pathways such as the Qld Seniors Enquiry Line (1300 135 500).

Living free from violence is everyone's right and reducing violence is everyone's responsibility. If you need help or advice, please phone Policelink on 131 444 or alternatively, call the Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit on 3364 4081.