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# Hidden in the cultural fabric: Elder abuse and neglect in ethno-cultural communities in Alberta

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# Hidden in the Cultural Fabric: Older Adult Abuse and Neglect in Ethno- Cultural Communities in Alberta

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◆ *The older people are suffering a lot but no one wants to talk about their sufferings. We cannot do much as we cannot interfere in somebody's family life.*

*- Quoted from a participant in the Punjabi community*

*You also have to be strong and willing to say NO when your child wants to dictate in your live, you must say "No, you can't command me".*

*- Quoted from a participant in the Latin American community*

*Because of the face issue, the seniors don't want others to look down upon them. Also, there is an old saying for Chinese—"Not spreading shameful family matters to outsiders". If someone knows their family matters but not showing sympathy towards the seniors, it will make them lose their face.*

*- Quoted from a participant in the Chinese community*

# Introduction

- ❖ Older adult abuse and neglect in ethno-cultural communities is both a “hidden” and “un-hidden” issue.
- ❖ Personal experience, cultural practices, and beliefs may make it difficult for ethnic community members to recognize and define older adult abuse and neglect incidences.

# Purpose of the study

- ◆ This study aims to explore and understand older adult abuse and neglect issues in ethno-cultural communities in Alberta and to identify strategies for promoting awareness of the issues.



# Methodology

- ◆ Focus group and key informant interviews
  - ◆ Eleven focus group consultations - 126 participants (65 and older from culturally diverse communities)
  - ◆ Five key informant interviews - 6 participants (3 older adults from culturally diverse communities and 3 service providers)
- ◆ Calgary, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Red Deer from end of 2010 to early 2012
- ◆ Ethnic background: Chinese (Mandarin & Cantonese), Vietnamese, Latin American, Punjabi, Filipinos, Bhutanese, Black.



# Be with children

- ❖ Older adults from different ethnic groups have a common need, the need or desire to be with their children.

*I think female elderly Chinese are more vulnerable as compared with mainstream seniors. It is because traditional Chinese put forth their off-springs' ultimate benefit first that makes parents willing to sacrifice for their children. The Chinese parents are so ready to give almost everything for their children and they expect their children to care for them in their aging years. (A female participant, Chinese, Calgary)*

# Be with children (cont'd)

*We will realize the value of family when we do not have family and we need them. We have come to live in a system....we get mistreatment but still we do not want to live alone. (A male participant, Punjabi, Edmonton)*

# Abuse/mistreatment

- ◆ Some of these older adults are not living in the kind of life that they once dreamed for. Some have experienced elder abuse or mistreatment by their children or in-laws.
- ◆ Older adult abuse is not uncommon to recognize, participants have heard about incidences about not treating parents the way their community would expect.

# Fear

- ◆ Older adult in abuse are afraid of their abuser, mostly are their own children.
  - ◆ They fear about their children would desert them and could no longer be with them;
  - ◆ No longer be allowed to see their grandchildren;
  - ◆ Treat them even worse;
  - ◆ Have to flee for life if they make the abuse known to outsider or to the authority;
- ◆ This fear is a pulling force to keep them from revealing the abuse.

# Fear (cont'd)

*And there are times that we don't report it out of fear like when it happened to my daughter, I didn't report it because I was afraid they wouldn't let me see my grandchildren. (a female Latin American participant in Edmonton)*

*Some of the elderly people are uneducated and are unable to express their problems. Some of our elderly people do not talk as they are afraid of their family. (a Punjabi participant in Calgary)*

# Hiding the abuse

- ◆ “do not want outsiders to know about things inside their family.”
- ◆ “to avoid damage to the image of the home”
- ◆ “have to protect children’s reputation”.

# Hiding the abuse (cont'd)

*Bring shame to family if it gets out to the public. But I think the fear factor is a big one if I tell then everybody knows about this. I think this is to do with the elderly too as they are the dependents on the care takers, the children, their own children or hired caretakers. They depend on them for care whether it is food or whatever. The fear factor kicks in that I better not let anyone know; because this will treat me worse, so just take it. ( a female participant, Red Deer)*



# Hiding the abuse (cont'd)

*The biggest problem is that people whether old or young do not talk about their problems in their own community because of the image of their family. It is very common in our Punjabi community. The elderly people keep on suffering from elder abuse and neglect but they do not talk about their issues to their own relatives or members of their community.  
(a Punjabi participant in Calgary)*

# Lifestyle & value systems

- ◆ Differences in lifestyle and value systems play an important role in family conflicts

*Not only the Vietnamese community but also other communities face such situations. For the Vietnamese, I think there are differences between ways of life / lifestyles in Vietnam and here..... Once here older people from Vietnam might not be able to adjust to life / lifestyles here. It's impossible for them to live by themselves – Yet, living together with their children will likely lead to certain conflicts. (a female Vietnamese participant in Calgary)*

# North American societal attitude

- ◆ North American societal attitude toward parents might be a factor in the children's changing value to their dependent aging parents.

# Barriers

- ◆ Language barrier, isolation, lack of knowledge about the Canadian system and their rights, not knowing resources or access to services/resources.

*There is also language problem. A person who does not know English has no choice but to live with the children. A person who does not know how to drive depends on his children. He cannot go out due to weather conditions. He keeps on getting ill-treatment because of these reasons.  
(A male participant, Punjabi, Edmonton)*

# Barriers (cont'd)

*It is worse here when it comes to mistreatment and neglect of elderly people. In India, the neighborhood and relatives reprimand the children if they try to mistreat the elderly people. Here in Canada, all houses are closed. The next-door neighbor does not know what kind of treatment the elderly people get at home. (a participant in the Punjabi group in Calgary)*

# Parents' understanding

- ◆ Parents need to recognize the struggles and stress (taking 2 jobs, financial or caregiving for kids) that challenge their adult children.

*As far as I can see, tight financial situation is often what is experienced by the children who sponsor their parents. They have to provide for their children and now for their parents too... However, some parents are kind of demanding; they want to spend for certain things and this could lead to conflicts resulting in the family losing its harmony. So, the first thing is about money. (a Vietnamese participant in Calgary)*



# Parents' understanding (cont'd)

*In my country, older people have in mind that their children will take care of them. Probably, when they come here, they are expecting their children will continue to take care of them. But here is totally different situation. For older people it is very hard for them to understand them (children). For here, every member of the family has to work. They put up money for things. It is hard for the parents to comprehend, for them, quite lay back in life .... Immigrants have 2 jobs and it is hard for the parents to understand this. They put pressure on the younger generation. (a female Latin American participant in Red Deer)*



# Male dominance

- ◆ Male dominance is believed to be another contributing factor to abuse as the societal norm may normalize incidences of violence and abuse. Migration to Canada brings up another perspective on redefining relationship which values human rights and equality.

# Recommendations

Various approaches that are believed to be useful in educating and informing ethnic minority older adults and their children about older adult abuse and suggestion to deal with older adult abuse at the community level.

# Education for Older Adults

- ◆ Education
  - ◆ Message delivered
  - ◆ Means of delivery
  - ◆ Manner
  - ◆ Testimonial

# Support for Older Adults

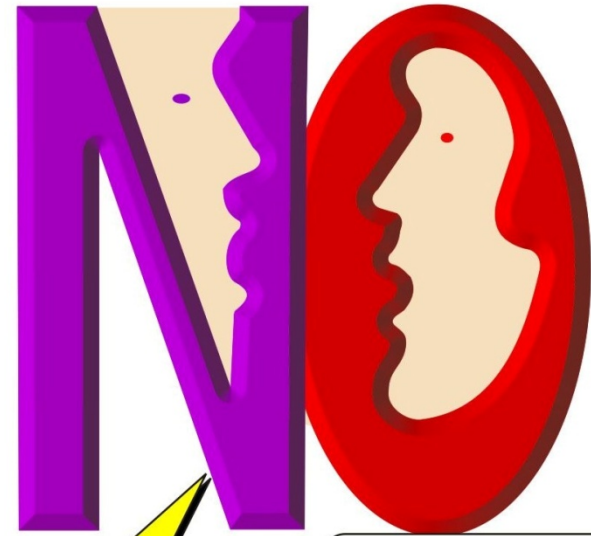
## ◆ Supports

- ◆ Ethno-specific support
- ◆ Community organizations/leaders to help older adults
- ◆ Friendly visits to older adults
- ◆ Meeting place for older adults
- ◆ Transportation
- ◆ Government support

# Concluding Strategy

- ◆ Use of pictures, images, and stories
  - ◆ Comic book approach

Say **“NO”** to **Elder Abuse**



向虐老 說“不”

Nói “KHÔNG” với  
Ngược Đãi Người Cao Tuổi

Diga “NO ” al Maltrato  
al Anciano

قل “لا” للعنف ضد المسنين

ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗਾਂ ਦੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਬੇਸ਼ਟ ਨੂੰ “ਨਾ” ਕਹੋ

*Thank you!*

*Discussion*