

Cultural understandings of abuse of older people: Perspectives from the Chinese community

Research Question

We examined how abuse of older people is perceived, understood and recognized by Chinese older people, their family caregivers and practitioners, such as social workers.

Background

Family members or carers can cause harm to older people (60 y/o and above) through their actions or by failing to provide care. Common forms of abuse include psychological, financial , physical or sexual harm.

For the Chinese community, cultural values, such as family obligation to and respect for older people, can shape understanding and experiences of abuse.

What We Did

We conducted 10 interviews and 2 focus groups (each with 5 participants) with late life Chinese migrants. We also interviewed 15 family carers and 7 practitioners who regularly support older people experiencing abuse.

What We Found

Older Chinese people worry most about emotional neglect by their adult children as they have limited access to other sources of support.



They often experience losing control of their finances to their adult children. Having their immigration status tied to their children's can also restrict their independence and ability to get help when experiencing abuse or family tensions.

Ethnic and age-based discrimination can complicate family dynamics and prevent them from seeking help or accessing appropriate support.

What This Means

Family tensions, neglect and abuse can evolve out of changing situations after immigration or as people age. Older people, their children and grandchildren have changing needs and face cultural and economic pressures that also change over time.

Practitioners, family carers and older people should be better informed to recognize all forms of abuse and neglect. More awareness raising and culturally responsive support services are needed to mitigate abuse of older people and family caregiving burden. Support services can also strengthen older people's independence, social resources and networks.

Immigration policies should be reviewed to minimize older people's dependence on their family and vulnerability to abuse.