

Changing Perceptions of Elder Abuse

A quiz and a book to increase public awareness about elder abuse

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Suggested reading: Marie Beaulieu and Johannie Bergeron-Patenaude, *La maltraitance envers les aînés. Changer le regard...*, Presses de l'Université Laval, April 2012.

There are topics that we think we know about, but, in reality, they are surrounded by misconceptions and misperceptions. Elder abuse is one such topic. Indeed, common misbeliefs are that elderly women are more vulnerable than men to abuse, that all forms of abuse are provided for in the criminal code, and, as a result, that they can be easily prosecuted in the courts. Others include that physical abuse (striking, injuries, etc.) is the most widespread form and that violence in elderly couples always stems from long-standing patterns.

To help dispel these myths and really test the public's knowledge, our research team developed a quiz based on 18 statements calling for true or false responses.

Knowledge Leading to Action

Work on combating ageism has long shown that changes in attitudes and behaviors must be based on access to sound knowledge. Too often, a lack of knowledge about a situation leads to a cascade of inappropriate answers. In light of this work, we decided not to fight all forms of ageism but rather to specifically target changing the perception of a widespread but poorly understood phenomenon, perhaps because it is still taboo: elder abuse.

In developing the quiz on elder abuse, we drew inspiration from the work of Erdman B. Palmore (1998), a pioneer in this field through his *Facts on Aging Quiz*. We adopted a rigorous nine-step research method: selection of 18 themes; recent literature review (within the last 10 years) putting emphasis on work carried out in Quebec and Canada as well as internationally; development of 18 statements; summary development of responses; validation of themes, statements, and summary responses by a committee of eight international experts; validation of the quiz with more than 200 people from various segments of the population; modification of the quiz based on feedback; development of associated materials, such as a textbook containing the quiz, responses, explanations, contexts, and avenues for reflection associated with a presentation for group facilitation; and final validation by the committee of international experts.

The elderly played an important role throughout this long process by sharing their concerns related to elder abuse. They commented on the wording of our statements and responses, and they encouraged the dissemination of our materials. Through their involvement, we observed that the elderly are prepared to use entertaining activities, such as a quiz, to broach a delicate topic that concerns them directly or affects the people around them.

In order to contribute to the wellness of the elderly, we opted to disseminate our materials throughout Quebec. In doing so, we are taking an educational approach in preventing elder abuse, since we are convinced that the people who take the quiz or read our book will be able to recognize situations of abuse and help put an end to them. 🕯



Les deux auteures à l'occasion du lancement du livre