



## **WEBINAR**

# **Mutual Mistreatment in the Context of Caregiving:**

*When Neurocognitive Disorders Spark Confusion*



**December 3, 2025**

**1 PM - 2 PM (ET) | 10 AM - 11 AM (PT)**

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT





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## Communication



**Microphones:** All attendees will be muted during the webinar.

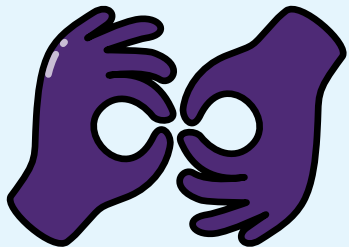


**CHAT Box** - Welcome to post comments during the session.



**Q & A** - Type your questions in Question/Answer Box and addressed after the presentation.

## ASL



- **Image and name** (ASL Interpreter) on screen
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## Evaluation



Your feedback on knowledge gain from the session and suggestions for future topics is appreciated.

- Follow-up email with survey link

## Recording



A recorded version of this webinar will be available and posted on EAPO and CNPEA websites.

Links and documents shared during the webinar will also be posted.

# Respecting Privacy and Confidentiality



We appreciate there may be personal circumstances or issues which participants may wish to address. However, in keeping with our commitment to maintaining your privacy and confidentiality, today we will be answering general questions posed through the Q&A.

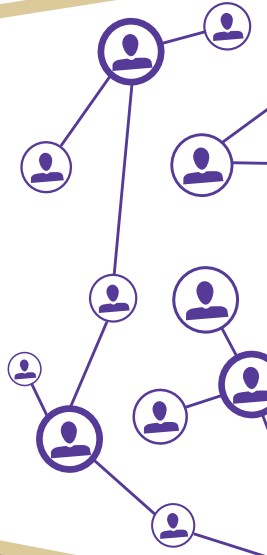


If someone wishes to discuss specific circumstances, we invite you to contact EAPO following this webinar to arrange for a confidential conversation so that we may further assist you.



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RESPECT



Stop Abuse.  
Restore Respect.



## Vision

EAPO envisions an Ontario where all seniors are **free** from **ageism and abuse**, where **human rights** are advanced, **protected** and **respected**.

EAPO is mandated to support the implementation of  
**Ontario's Strategy to Combat Elder Abuse.**



Funded by the Ontario Government, under the  
*Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA)*



# Canadian Network For the Prevention of Elder Abuse

## MISSION

**The CNPEA works to improve awareness, supports, and capacity to develop a national coordinated approach to elder abuse and neglect. We promote the rights of seniors through knowledge mobilization, collaboration, policy reform and education.**

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## **Mélanie Couture, PhD**

Chairholder of the Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults,  
Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Université de Sherbrooke

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Mélanie has worked as a researcher in social gerontology for more than a decade. Her research promotes the co-construction and integration of clinical and organizational innovations for the prevention and management of mistreatment situations in the context of caregiving, common living environments and in the use of technologies for aging in place.





# Mutual mistreatment in a caregiving context: When Neurocognitive Disorders Spark Confusion

MÉLANIE COUTURE, PH.D., Associate professor and Chairholder of the Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults – Université de Sherbrooke

CNPEA WEBINAR

DECEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2025



Chaire de recherche sur la maltraitance  
envers les personnes âgées

Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults

## Objectives

- ▶ Based on recent scientific data, this presentation aims to clarify factors that cause difficulties in caregiver-care receiver relationship :
  - ▶ Conceptualization of neurocognitive disorders
  - ▶ Mental health of informal caregivers
  - ▶ Strategies used by the caregiver

# What is the mistreatment?

## Federal Policy Definition (2023):

- ▶ “Mistreatment of older persons is a **single or repeated event** that involves a person, a group, a community, or an organization and occurs within a relationship where there is an **expectation of trust**, when an **act, word, attitude, or lack of appropriate action** causes or risks **causing negative consequences** for an older person.
- ▶ It includes events of **physical, psychological, financial or material, and sexual mistreatment** that can be expressed in the form of violence (act word or attitude) or neglect (lack of appropriate action).”

# Elder abuse prevalence and risk factors: findings from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging

David Burnes<sup>ID</sup><sup>1</sup>✉, Karl Pillemer<sup>ID</sup><sup>2</sup>, Tony Rosen<sup>3</sup>, Mark S. Lachs<sup>4</sup> and Lynn McDonald<sup>1</sup> 2022

- ▶ **Sample of 23 468 Canadians living at home**
  - ▶ Women (53%)
  - ▶ Average age of 69 years old
  - ▶ 97% Caucasians
  - ▶ 72% in a relationship
  - ▶ Majority of family income between \$20 000 to \$100 000
  - ▶ 78% live urban areas
- ▶ **Prevalence of 10% in the last year**



# Example of mistreatment risk factors

(Burnes et al., 2022)

## Cognitive decline (transition)

- The cognitive status is not a risk factor

## Decrease of health and functional capacities

- Dependence toward another person for care and protection

# Prevalence of mistreatment in the context of neurocognitive disorders

The prevalence of mistreatment of adults is higher among older adults **with neurocognitive disorders living in the community,** from **50 to 70 %**

(Pickering et al., 2020; Wigglesworth et al., 2010; Yan, 2014)



## MISTREATMENT IN A CAREGIVING CONTEXT

- ▶ Three mistreatment scenarios are possible:
  - ▶ Mistreatment toward the informal caregiver,
  - ▶ Mistreatment toward the care recipient,
  - ▶ **Mutual mistreatment between the informal caregiver and the care recipient.**

# Caregiver-care recipient with neurocognitive disorders dynamic (Välimäki et al., 2020)

- ▶ Mistreatment result from the caregiver-care recipient dynamic
- ▶ Modulation:
  - ▶ Particularities associated to neurocognitive disorders
  - ▶ Quality of the relationship
  - ▶ Social and cultural environment



An abstract, complex geometric structure composed of numerous thin, white and light blue lines forming a dense, interconnected web of polygons and cubes. The structure is set against a dark, almost black background, with a subtle gradient of purple and blue at the bottom. The overall effect is one of intricate, three-dimensional complexity.

# Understanding the care recipient's neurocognitive disorders

MISTREATMENT AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE CONDITION AND BEHAVIORS

# What neurocognitive disorders?

- ▶ “ “Neurocognitive disorders are characterized by a loss of mental faculties that **reduces a person’s ability to care for themselves independently**. There is a decline in performance in one or more cognitive domains such as memory, attention, executive functions (e.g., planning, organization, abstraction), **language**, visuomotor functions, or **social skills**.” ” (Alzheimer Society)
- ▶ Also **changes mood and behaviors!**

# POTENTIAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MISTREATMENT TOWARD PEOPLE WITH NEUROCOGNITIVE DISORDERS

- ▶ Persons with neurocognitive disorders:
  - Behavioral problems (Melchiorre et al., 2017; Pickering et al., 2020; Serra et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2022)
  - Functional deficit linked to activities of daily living (Melchiorre et al., 2017)



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## MISTREATMENT TOWARD THE INFORMAL CAREGIVER

- ▶ “I have accompanied a lady, whose husband had Alzheimer’s disease and the husband, mistreated the lady physically. He **pinched her, he hit her**. But it was a man that was **very gentle before the disease**. So, it really was the disease that changed the husband throughout all of this.”

[free translation]



# Perceptions and negatives beliefs of the informal caregiver

- ▶ Opinions and beliefs of the informal caregivers about neurocognitive disorders modulates their experiences, attitudes and behaviors (Oliveira et al., 2023):
  - ▶ **Lack of knowledge about dementia** = less empathetic toward the feelings of the affected person = distress for the person and guilt for the informal caregivers
  - ▶ **Concept of “depersonalization”**: a person affected by dementia is absent, strange, without emotion, passive, helpless or manipulative
    - ▶ Feelings of the person affected by dementia are not “valid”
    - ▶ Some symptoms of dementia are perceived as manipulation attempts
    - ▶ Victim blaming if caregivers think that the care receiver could have done something about the evolution of their condition

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## OFFERING TRAINING ABOUT NEUROCOGNITIVE DISORDERS AND MISTREATMENT

- ▶ “We also give a lot of **training on neurocognitive disorders**, so with that there is always an aspect about respecting the person, **respecting the autonomy of the person**. We also have support group workshops for informal caregivers so, they can sometimes **set their own boundaries**.” (free translation)

# Informative websites

## Mistreatment

- ▶ Mistreatment Helpline
  - <https://lignemaltraitance.ca/en>

## Support related to the role of informal caregiver and available resources

- ▶ APPUI pour les proches aidants
  - <https://www.lappui.org/en/>

## Information related to the care recipient's condition

- ▶ Alzheimer Society
  - <https://alzheimer.ca/en>

## Informative websites (continued)

Yes, but...

- Availability in different languages
- Demands a certain level of literacy
- **Studies show that information on its own is not enough to support informal caregivers**



# Online learning program for informal caregivers

- Many systematic reviews have shown **the effectiveness of online program to improve the well-being and health of informal caregiver** (Boots, 2014; Egan et al., 2018; Hopwood et al., 2018; Parra-Vidales et al., 2017).
- Online learning program (e-learning) can improve the access to information while allowing to **learn at their own pace** (Hamtini, 2008).
- ▶ Multi components online interventions **more effective especially if it includes someone making follow-ups such as a therapist** (Boots et al., 2014).



# Informal caregivers' mental health

WHEN WE SUFFER, WE ARE LESS RECEPTIVE TO THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

# MISTREATMENT TOWARD INFORMAL CAREGIVERS

- The prevalence of mistreatment toward informal caregivers is high:
  - ▶ **30% of informal caregiver**  
(Pinyopornpanish et al., 2022)
  - ▶ **Mainly psychological mistreatment**  
(Obst et al., 2020)
- Informal caregivers are at a greater risk if they are responsible of more activities of daily living, are older and take care of a family member  
(Pinyopornpanish et al., 2022)
- Violence is linked to burden and depression in informal caregivers  
(Pinyopornpanish et al., 2022)

POTENTIAL  
FACTORS  
ASSOCIATED  
WITH  
MISTREATMENT  
TOWARD  
PEOPLE WITH  
NEUROCOGNIT  
IVE DISORDERS

► Informal caregivers:

- Anxiety (Melchiorre et al., 2017; Serra et al., 2018)
- Depression (Melchiorre et al., 2017; Serra et al., 2018)
- Less social support perceived (Melchiorre et al., 2017; Pérez-Royo et al., 2009)
- High burden (Melchiorre et al., 2017; Serra et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2022)



# Stress and burden

Changes in relationships with the family member and an increase in responsibilities (Lee et al., 2019)

Chronic imbalances between demands and resources → stress → exhaustion (Gérain and Zech, 2019)

It is not all informal caregiver that experience stress that will mistreat, and other elements contribute to the situation

# PRESENCE OF ANGER

How is anger linked to mistreatment in a caregiving context (Ali & Bokharey, 2016):

- ▶ **Demands and constant surveillance** of the person with neurocognitive disorders = **frustration of the informal caregiver**
- ▶ **Personal goals of the informal caregiver are being put aside** bringing a feeling of incompetence and powerlessness = **anger**
- ▶ **Anger can be expressed in the form of psychological mistreatment** by being critical and blaming, also with verbal aggressions
- ▶ Mistreatment is also a **response to certain behaviors of mistreatment toward the informal caregivers** such as not listening, arguing and criticizing

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## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- ▶ “I do not want you to solve their **intimate partner violence problem**, I want you to **take it into consideration when taking charge and offering services**. Because here, we have a **husband who was violent all of his life** who has now become vulnerable who has dementia and cannot manage, **his hygiene is entirely inadequate**. **He is resistant to services**. He rejects them even when it is his wife who wants to do it. **She tries, but it does not work**. And **she is very small and very vulnerable**. And **she is afraid**, and she will not confront him.” (free translation)

# Supporting the emotional needs of informal caregivers

- ▶ Support to manage negative emotions
  - ▶ Fear, anger, guilt, concern (McCabe et al., 2016)
  - ▶ Burden and uncertainty linked to the role (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016)
  - ▶ Depression (Chow & Ho, 2012)
- ▶ Respite to have free time
  - ▶ Fatigue (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2016)



# Importance of needs assessment

- ▶ Autorecognition and recognition
- ▶ Opening the discussion
- ▶ History of the informal caregiver
- ▶ Identification of the strengths and weaknesses (abilities)
- ▶ Identification of personal needs
- ▶ Development of an individualized intervention plan



# Adoption of inadequate strategies

SIMPLY PUT, THAT IS WHAT MISTREATMENT IN A CAREGIVING CONTEXT IS!

# Notion of intentionality

The person can cause harm to another person willingly or not.

- **Intentional:** the person who mistreats wants to cause harm to the person.
- **Unintentional:** the person who mistreats does not want to cause harm or does not understand the harm caused.

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## LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE PERSON WITH NEUROCOGNITIVE DISORDERS

- “It allows him [the husband] to see how I interact with her, because he **needs to learn how to communicate** with a person with this disease. **He was unwillingly causing crises because he uses confrontation.** So, as he sees me doing it, it teaches him the technic and at the same time, the lady is starting to bond with me.”  
[free translation]



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## INFORMAL CAREGIVERS MUST REFRAIN FROM “ADAPTING” TO MISTREATMENT BEHAVIORS

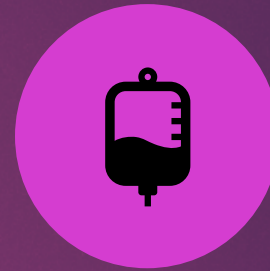
- ▶ “This training explains **what are the impacts of this disorder**. And after that, we will talk of a participatory approach and how to adapt the environment, and **how we can adapt as an informal caregiver**. But then, the way it is presented and perceived by informal caregivers could be dangerous... **By accepting mistreatment behaviors, you tell yourself : ‘Oh, but I need to adapt.’”**

[free translation]

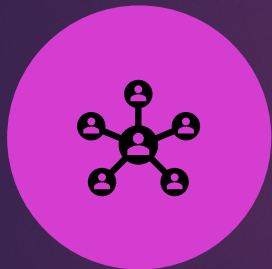
# Mistreatment in a caregiving context



The challenges encountered as an informal caregiver do not justify acts of mistreatment.



Inversely, being sick and vulnerable does not justify causing harm to the informal caregiver.



Often a result of interpersonal conflicts present for many years.



Overtime, a person may have been mistreated and may have mistreated.

# Important points to remember!

- ▶ Need to be even more careful during transition periods!
- ▶ Necessity to assess the needs of informal caregivers as well as level of knowledge about neurocognitive disorders
- ▶ Discuss the relational dynamic
- ▶ Presence of anger, depression, anxiety, burden increase the risks of mistreatment in a caregiving context
- ▶ Difficult for informal caregivers to manage problematic behaviors/mistreatment behaviors

# Grey Targets – Official podcast



The Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults is proud to announce the launch of the English version of its official podcast Grey Targets.

<https://maltraitancedesaines.com/en/podcasts/>

With the participation of:

Québec 

 Université de Sherbrooke

 Centre de recherche sur le vieillissement





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**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**

# References

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# Stay in touch with us



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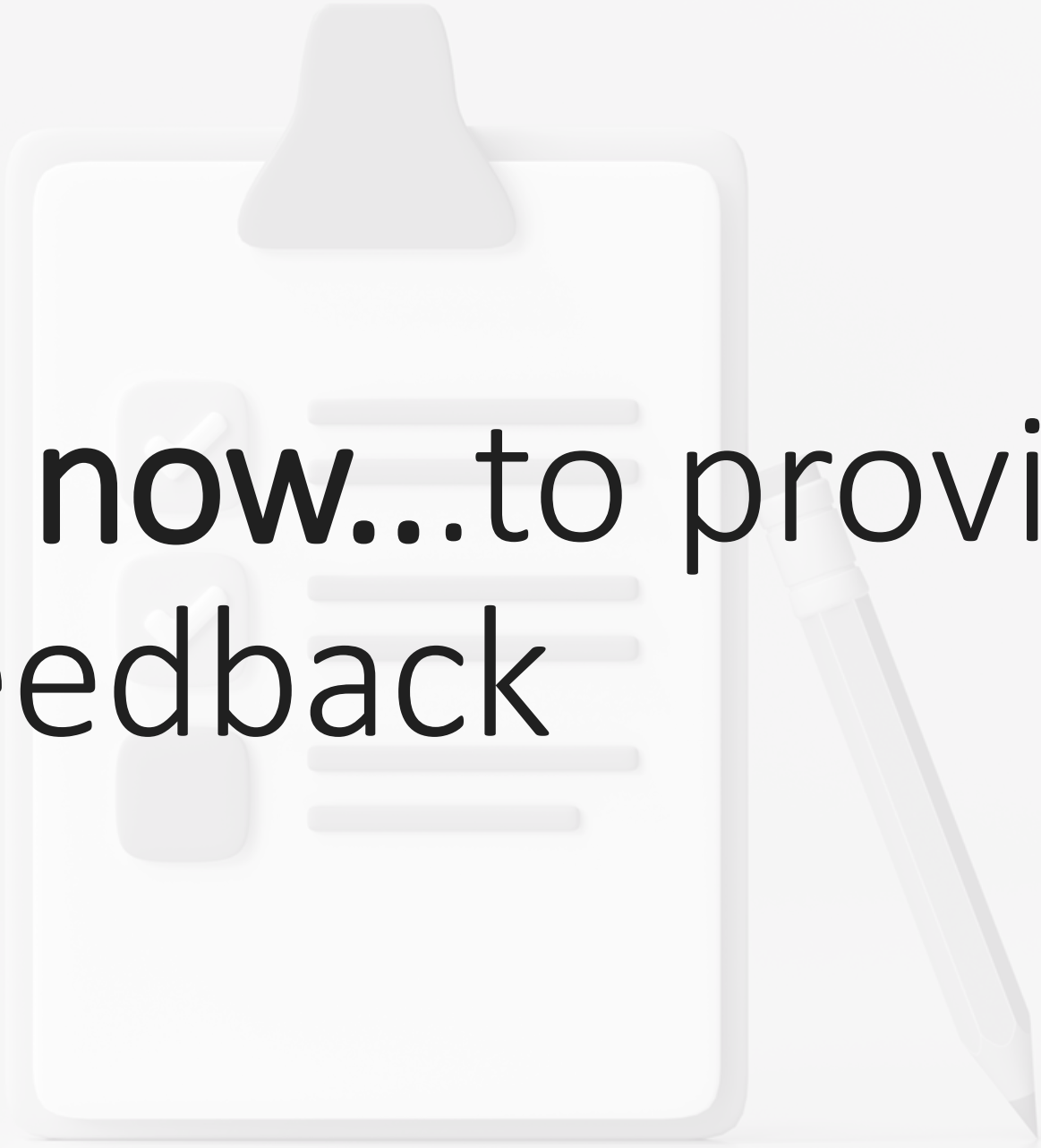
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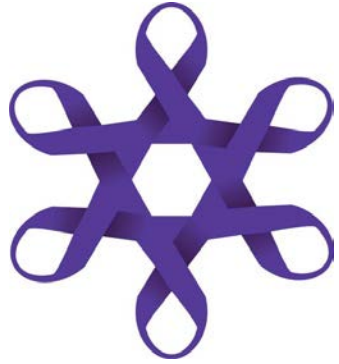


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**EVALUATION**

*Evaluation*





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