

# Report summary: Insights into the abuse of older Queenslanders

The *Insights into the abuse of older Queenslanders* research project involved investigating information available in police and courts administrative data to contribute to the evidence base regarding the abuse of older Queenslanders. While these sources of information cannot be analysed to show the prevalence of the abuse of older people in the general community due to acknowledged levels of underreporting, they can be examined to determine if the volume of recorded personal crime victimisation and domestic violence orders (DVOs) involving older people has changed over time and provide insight into the characteristics of older people experiencing abuse as reported to the law and justice system.

## Key findings

The report's findings are based on analyses of 2008–09 to 2020–21 data. The respondent is the person listed on a DVO as the perpetrator of domestic and family violence (DFV), while the aggrieved is listed as a person experiencing DFV.

Older people accounted for a smaller share of total victims of personal crime victimisations and aggrieved listed on DVOs, than that found in the general community. This underrepresentation may reflect the underreporting of experiences to law and justice agencies and/or findings from other research which shows that the perpetration and experience of crime tends to decline with age.

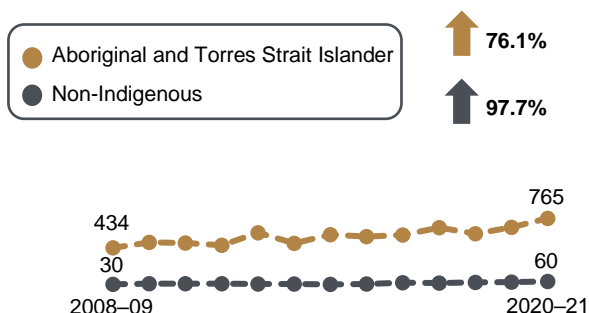
### Representation of older people in the community and among victimisations and DVO applications (%)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population who are 50 years or older	14.2	Non-Indigenous population who are 65 years or older	14.8
Victimisations involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims	6.1	Victimisations involving older non-Indigenous victims	2.3
DVO applications involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aggrieved	11.2	DVO applications involving older non-Indigenous aggrieved	3.4

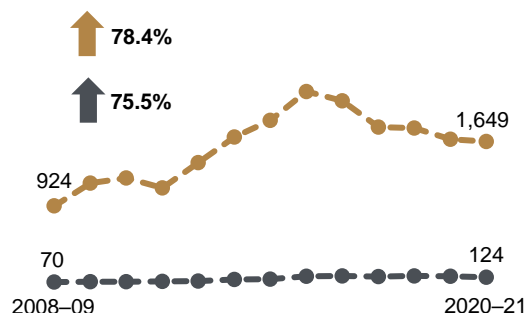
The project defined abuse as the experience of personal victimisation perpetrated by a person known to the victim (a known person) or being listed as the aggrieved on a DVO. Between 2008–09 and 2020–21, more than seven in ten (71.4%) total personal victimisations involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims were perpetrated by a known person compared with less than half (45.4%) of those involving non-Indigenous victims. While older people were underrepresented among victims and aggrieved, rates of abuse perpetrated by known persons increased over the observation period and this growth was larger in magnitude than that observed for younger people.

Rates of abuse perpetrated by known persons were higher among older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples than older non-Indigenous people across the reporting period. However, while rates of abuse increased for both groups when comparing 2008–09 with 2020–21, a substantial decline in DVO applications involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was observed following 2015–16 — a year characterised by substantial criminal justice system reform relating to DFV.

### Rate of victimisations perpetrated by a known person against an older victim per 100,000 older persons



### Rate of DVO applications involving older aggrieved per 100,000 older persons

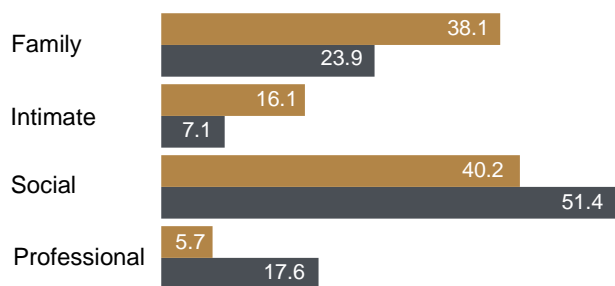


Observed changes in the rate of abuse could reflect changes in the reporting/detection of the abuse of older people by the law and justice system, and/or an increase in the prevalence of abuse experienced by older people over time.

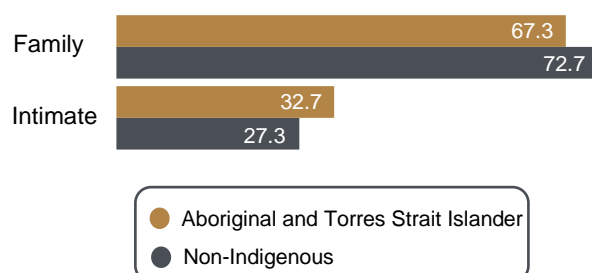


Personal crime victimisations perpetrated by known persons and DVO applications involving older people tended to relate to actions perpetrated by social contacts and family members, rather than intimate partners or professionals. That said, victimisations involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims more often occurred in family and intimate relationships compared with non-Indigenous victims.

**Victimisations perpetrated by a known person against an older victim by relationship context (%)**



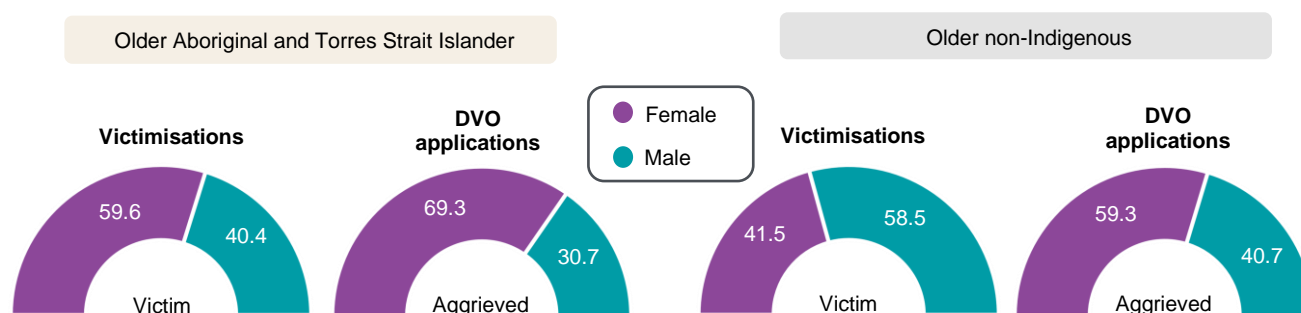
**DVO applications involving an older aggrieved by relationship context (%)**



The relationship dynamics relating to the abuse of older people tended to be different to that associated with domestic and family violence occurring among younger people (where the involvement of family members was less common). The higher prevalence of family members involved in the perpetration of abuse of older people is likely to reflect changes to relationship dynamics that can occur over time (such as reduced cohabitation with intimate partners due to their passing and increased reliance on other family members).

While females were more commonly listed than males as the aggrieved on DVO applications involving older aggrieved, regardless of Indigenous status, the gender profile of personal crime victimisations perpetrated by known persons against older people varied in relation to Indigenous status. More specifically, male victims were more common than female victims among personal victimisations involving non-Indigenous people. This coincided with males accounting for the majority of offenders and respondents relating to the abuse of both older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and older non-Indigenous peoples.

**Gender of older people experiencing abuse (%)**



The gender profile of personal crime victimisations perpetrated by known persons and aggrieved listed on DVO applications involving older people aligns with gendered understandings of DFV discussed elsewhere, and the relatively high representation of male victims among personal crime victimisations experienced by older non-Indigenous people is likely to reflect the context in which they occur. That is, non-Indigenous victimisations involving older people more commonly involved social and professional relationships, rather than intimate personal and family relationships, than those recorded for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The age disparity between victims and offenders, and aggrieved and respondents, suggests that the abuse of older people is often intergenerational. However, the gap in average ages was typically smaller for victimisations perpetrated by known persons and DVO applications involving older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared with non-Indigenous people.

**Age difference between older people experiencing abuse and perpetrators (average ages)**

Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		Older non-Indigenous	
<p><b>Victimisations</b></p> <p><b>Female</b></p> <p>Offender 20.3 years younger than the victim</p> <p>Victim age – 56.8 years</p> <p>Offender age – 36.4 years</p> <p><b>Male</b></p> <p>Offender 22.1 years younger than the victim</p> <p>Victim age – 57.0 years</p> <p>Offender age – 34.9 years</p>	<p><b>DVO applications</b></p> <p><b>Female</b></p> <p>Respondent 18.5 years younger than the aggrieved</p> <p>Aggrieved age – 57.6 years</p> <p>Respondent age – 39.0 years</p> <p><b>Male</b></p> <p>Respondent 19.6 years younger than the aggrieved</p> <p>Aggrieved age – 57.6 years</p> <p>Respondent age – 38.0 years</p>	<p><b>Victimisations</b></p> <p><b>Female</b></p> <p>Offender 27.3 years younger than the victim</p> <p>Victim age – 73.8 years</p> <p>Offender age – 46.4 years</p> <p><b>Male</b></p> <p>Offender 28.0 years younger than the victim</p> <p>Victim age – 71.6 years</p> <p>Offender age – 43.6 years</p>	<p><b>DVO applications</b></p> <p><b>Female</b></p> <p>Respondent 23.6 years younger than the aggrieved</p> <p>Aggrieved age – 71.8 years</p> <p>Respondent age – 48.3 years</p> <p><b>Male</b></p> <p>Respondent 28.2 years younger than the aggrieved</p> <p>Aggrieved age – 71.7 years</p> <p>Respondent age – 43.5 years</p>

Indications of intergenerational relationships being involved in abuse aligns with findings elsewhere which show that younger family members, particularly adult children, are often the perpetrators of abuse of older people, although offenders were also often much younger than the victim for victimisations occurring in social and professional relationship contexts also. This may relate to greater opportunities to commit abuse, negative attitudes informed by ageism, stressors related to providing care, and/or findings discussed elsewhere which show the perpetration of crime tends to decrease with age.

The smaller average age gap between perpetrators and older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and aggrieved compared with non-Indigenous victims and aggrieved, may relate to different family structures and differences in the relationship contexts in which abuse occurs for these groups.

**Conclusion**

While acknowledging the barriers to reporting the abuse of older people to law and justice agencies, this project has demonstrated the value of examining criminal justice data to understand elements of the abuse of older people. These data have shown how the prevalence and characteristics of (arguably more serious) abuse of older people can vary across different demographic groups and offer a way to support ongoing monitoring efforts. The project's findings broadly aligned with other sources of information, but also offered a way to observe trends over time and build further information regarding the abuse of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with the latter being an acknowledged information gap.

Variation in the characteristics of abuse of older people highlights the importance of targeted harm reduction strategies that account for these differences. For example, issues of power and control may be less relevant to the abuse of older people than is the case for domestic and family violence given the broader range of relationship contexts in which this type of abuse may occur. Having said this, intimate partner violence is still an element in the abuse of older people, for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples more so than older non-Indigenous people.