

Comparison of the pattern of elderly abuse in Hong Kong before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

This article was published on 25 Oct 2022 at www.hkmj.org.

Hong Kong Med J 2022;28:Epub
<https://doi.org/10.12809/hkmj2210304>

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To the Editor—We have previously published our observations on changes to the pattern of elderly abuse in 2020 (during the coronavirus disease 2019 [COVID-19] pandemic) compared with the pre-pandemic period.¹ There was a proportionate increase in physical abuse with the spouse as perpetrator. With the publication of additional data by the Social Welfare Department, we have obtained further data relating to elder abuse between 2014 and March 2022 (n=4293).² We compared data reported during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to March 2022 (n=996) with pre-pandemic data

(from 2014 to 2019, n=3297). The abuse methods and identity of perpetrator were compared using Chi squared statistics. The data are summarised in the Table.

There was proportionately more physical abuse (71.6% vs 65.9%, $\chi^2=11.0774$, $P=0.009$) but less financial abuse (8.2% vs 16.2%, $\chi^2=39.4716$, $P<0.001$) during the pandemic compared with the pre-pandemic period. Regarding the perpetrators, there were proportionately more spouses (64.8% vs 54.7%, $\chi^2=31.8566$, $P<0.001$). There was no difference in the pattern of elderly abuse or identity of perpetrators

TABLE. Elder abuse data in Hong Kong comparing pandemic (2020-March 2022) with pre-pandemic period (2014-2019)²

	2022 (Jan-Mar)	2021	2020	After pandemic [†]	Before pandemic [‡]
Types of abuse					
Physical	58	324	331	713*	2174*
Psychological	6	46	49	101	326
Neglect	0	2	0	2	15
Financial	5	31	46	82*	534*
Abandonment	0	1	0	1	5
Sexual	0	13	10	23	70
Others	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple abuse	7	34	33	74	173
Total	76	451	469	996	3297
Perpetrators					
Son	10	58	58	126	365
Daughter	6	20	12	38	109
Son-in-law	0	4	5	9	31
Daughter-in-law	1	4	8	13	87
Spouse	53	302	290	645*	1802*
Grandchildren	1	5	3	9	40
Relative	0	14	22	36	104
Friend/neighbour	1	10	20	31	263
Unrelated user living with victim	0	0	5	5	25
Domestic helper	2	23	37	62	295
Agency staff providing service to victim	2	2	4	8	75
Others	0	9	5	14	101
Total	76	451	469	996	3297

* $P<0.05$

† 2020 to March 2022

‡ 2014 to 2019

within the COVID-19 pandemic period (ie, 2020 to March 2022).

We continued to observe proportionately more physical abuse with the spouse as perpetrator during the pandemic. It is likely the initially low vaccination uptake among older adults and COVID-19 outbreak meant the older adults were more likely to remain at home. There were insufficient opportunities for recreational activities or social support. A spouse, often the only co-habitee, had more opportunities to inflict abuse. Government and social welfare organisations should be alerted to this change.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the drafting of the letter and critical revision for important intellectual content. All authors approved the final version for publication and take responsibility for its accuracy and integrity.

Conflicts of interest

As an editor of the journal, JKH Luk was not involved in the

peer review process. Other authors have disclosed no conflicts of interest.

Funding/support

This letter received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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