

THE SILENT CRISIS: ELDER ABUSE IN JEWISH COMMUNITY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- ▶ This presentation highlights experiences of victims of elder abuse in the Jewish community (many of whom are sponsored Jewish- Russian immigrants as well as Holocaust survivors) and how abuse and resettlement impacted their quality of life
- ▶ It will also cover factors contributing to elder abuse in the community

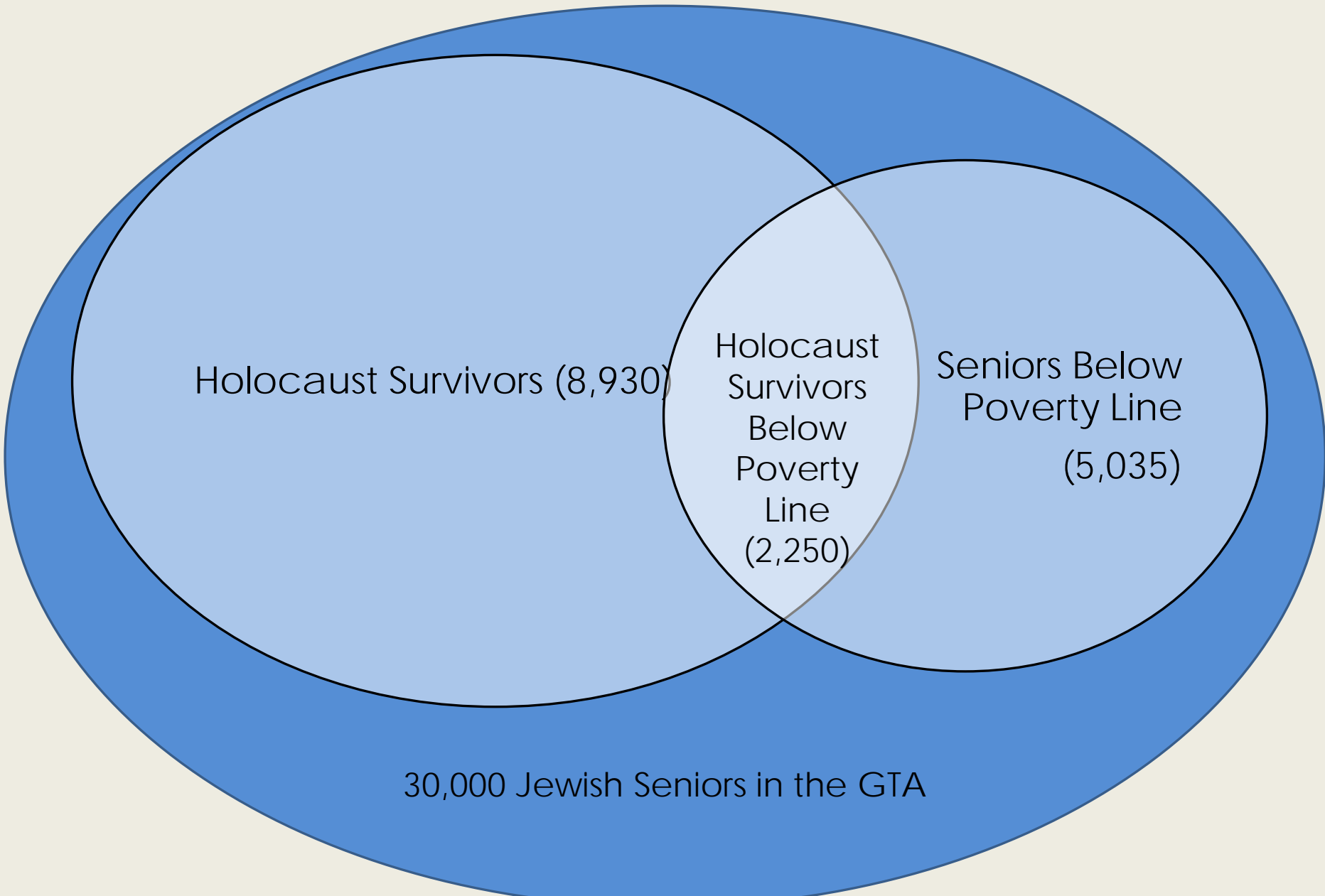


COMMUNITY PROFILE

- ▶ There are 30,000 Jewish seniors in the Greater Toronto Area
- ▶ 5,035 Jewish seniors live below the poverty line
- ▶ There were 4,830 “older seniors” (85+ years) with more complex and often unmet needs in 2011.
- ▶ This age group is projected to increase to 4,930 individuals by 2021 and to 5,759 by 2031.

(National Household Survey, 2011)

POVERTY LEVELS AMONG JEWISH SENIORS



(National Household Study, 2011: The Face of Poverty – Jewish Community Study, 2016)



GAPS IN SERVICES FOR SENIORS: EMERGING THEMES

- Lack of accessible and affordable housing and transportation
- Poverty and lack of affordable programs
- Isolation & Elder Abuse
- Lack of access and barriers to services and information in different languages
- Home Care Services & Caregivers' needs
- Complex mental health issues

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Holocaust survivors have challenges beyond the normal stresses of aging present among the overall older adult population, including but not limited to:

- higher rates of physical and emotional distress;
- greater likelihood of osteoporosis, dental problems, impaired vision, and heart issues from prolonged malnutrition in childhood and early adulthood;
- higher incidence of all cancers, especially breast and colorectal;
- higher rates of anxiety disorders, depression and sleep disturbances,
- greater difficulty performing daily living activities (Paratz, E. D., & Katz, B. 2011)



HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

- ▶ Aging child survivors from the FSU who recently moved to Canada represent a relatively large population with high needs.
- ▶ These survivors were never granted recognition of their early life trauma.
- ▶ They spent the most formative years of their lives under a totalitarian regime and encountered significant additional stresses.
- ▶ Many of these children experienced severe losses and fears associated with political oppression and totalitarian abuse (Shklarov, 2012).

JEWISH IMMIGRANT SENIORS

- ▶ Jewish older immigrants' lives in Toronto are very similar to those among from any other ethnic community in Canada, as they reflect common problems of language barriers, financial dependency and culture shock at old age
- ▶ Because immigrant seniors face difficulties in adjusting to a new society, they are more vulnerable to violence than mainstream Canadian seniors.
- ▶ An important distinction about Russian elders residing in Canada: for many of these seniors, this is a second immigration (first FSU to Israel, then to Canada)



ELDER ABUSE

- ▶ “Any action, or deliberate inaction, by a person in position of trust which causes harm to an older person” (World Health Organization, 2002)
- ▶ Elder abuse undermines a senior’s independence, dignity and sense of security, and it damages lives and destroys relationships in the process.



ELDER ABUSE

Factors contributing to elder abuse in ethnic communities:

- ▶ Language barriers and social isolation
- ▶ Financial and emotional dependency
- ▶ Inadequate housing and sponsorship laws
- ▶ Sociocultural factors & dysfunctional family dynamics
- ▶ Caregiver stress & personal characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator
- ▶ Lack of access to community resources (Podnieks, 2008)



PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE IN CANADA

Between 4% and 10% (58,000 to 145,000) of Canadian seniors experience some type of abuse.

The most common form is financial abuse, followed by emotional and physical abuse and neglect (Ministry of Citizenship, 2003).

Female seniors (38%) are more likely to be abused than male seniors (18%) (Ministry of Citizenship, 2003).

VICTIMS' NARRATIVES

Physical Abuse

"Whenever the abuser would get angry or annoyed with me, she would scratch my face and chest and would drag me across the kitchen floor by my hair. I desperately tried everything to stop the abuse: begged on my knees, appeased, compromised; but it didn't work. I took lots of sleeping pills to end this nightmare, but was unsuccessful."

(84 year old victim)

VICTIMS' NARRATIVES

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

“ ‘Mrs. E is a Holocaust survivor who was sponsored by her daughter and son-in-law 5 years ago. Since day one, Mrs E’s son-in-law became very hostile and expressed displeasure about her presence in his apartment’. For over a year Mrs E’s has been sleeping on a couch in a living room. She doesn’t have any bedding and has only a bed spread to cover with. She is not allowed to use the kitchen when her son-in-law is at home and at times has to wait for him to go to work so she can cook something to eat. Few month ago, she was brought to the Bernard Betel Centre by the police. She was found disoriented and wondering on the street. When asked, she stated that she was afraid to go home because of her son-in-law. ”

VICTIMS' NARRATIVES

Financial Abuse

"My daughter constantly tells me that I am a burden who is not worth spending money on. Even though I cook and clean for the whole family I am not allowed to eat meat, because it is too expensive and I don't contribute enough. But while in Russia, I sold my apartment with the furniture in it and wired over \$65,000 to my daughter, but I didn't get any of it back since I arrived in Canada."

(74 year old victim, surviving on food bank and odd jobs)

VICTIMS' NARRATIVES

Neglect

"Mr. & Mrs. G came to Canada four years ago to reunite with their daughter. Mr. G is a Holocaust survivor who has many serious health conditions and is need of special diet as well as medical supplies. Mr. G. daughter is paying for the rent and reluctantly visits her parents on rare occasions. As reported by their PSW often this couple has no food and their fridge is empty."

"Mr. M is a 92-year old decorated Jewish World War II veteran. In 2011 he came to Canada to reunite with his only daughter. Mr. M lives on his own in apartment with hardly any furniture or basic necessities. He spends day after day by himself in empty apartment. Mr.M's daughter visits on a rare occasion and he is relying on food that she brings. Often he goes hungry and questions why he lived this long to be treated this way."

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- ▶ Micro level: culturally sensitive social work services and empowerment model need to be adopted by professionals working with older immigrants
- ▶ Mezzo level: community social service agencies need to tailor their programs and policies to clients' specific and unique needs
- ▶ Macro level: Policy change is needed in three areas : Immigration, Housing and Home Care



THE SAFE OPTION PROGRAM

- ▶ Fills service gaps by providing critical support and intervention in English and Russian to the most vulnerable segment of the Canadian population – sponsored immigrant seniors who are victims (or at risk) of abuse.
- ▶ It also focuses on empowering seniors by educating them in English and Russian on elder abuse/neglect issues and available resources in the community



THE SAFE OPTION PROGRAM

- ▶ Over 250 abused seniors have received case management, short-term counselling and crisis intervention.
- ▶ Over 50 immigrant seniors have left abusive households and secured safe housing through Toronto Community Housing's priority housing program.
- ▶ More recently through a private donor, the Bernard Betel Centre has financially supported 37 neglected and abused sponsored Jewish seniors by assisting them with basic necessities of life, such as medical supplies, food and clothing.



THE SAFE OPTION PROGRAM

- ▶ Over the last three years, over 1000 vulnerable and marginalized seniors have participated in the centre's various workshops and learned about elder abuse and ways to escape dangerous and/or high risk situations.
- ▶ 600 isolated and immigrant seniors and Holocaust survivors recently participated in a creative arts program where they were able to express their feelings and emotions in a safe and creative environment.
- ▶ This program was offered free in five languages to seniors that due to language barriers and other limitations were not previously engaged or received service.

THE SAFE OPTION PROGRAM

- ▶ The program works in collaboration with other elder abuse organizations that have a shared goal of breaking the cycle of elder abuse.
- ▶ In partnership with Elder Abuse Ontario, North York Elder Abuse Network and Prevention of Elder Abuse Committee of York Region, Betel provides educational sessions on elder abuse at conferences, youth groups, and community organizations.
- ▶ The Bernard Betel Centre developed the first brochure written on elder abuse in Russian. This brochure contains resources located in the Greater Toronto Area where Russian-speaking seniors can access service in Russian.
- ▶ In 2013 we hosted a conference "Elder Abuse in Ethnic Communities: Victims Who Don't Speak English". This landmark conference was the first of its kind in Ontario and was attended by professionals working with immigrant seniors from many newcomer communities.

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