

Power and abuse: Video 1

Transcript

- [Narrator]

Power is not just about what one person does to another. It can also be about relationships between groups of people. Classes, genders, racialized groups, and other people with disability are examples of groups of people who may struggle against the power of more privileged dominant groups. This happens because society is structured so that some groups have better access to employment, wealth, and power than others.

Power is often confused with other related terms like authority, influence, coercion, force, control, violence, manipulation and strength. Although they may seem similar, power is in fact very different. Power is the way individuals or groups can get their own way even against the resistance of others. Choice or lack of choice is the key element here. It's important that you understand the different forms of power and how they are used so that you can keep your clients safe and happy.

When people hold ageist or ableist views that see old and disabled people as less valuable, the risk of abuse is much higher. This abuse may at first seem minor like speaking rudely to people or treating them like children. New research suggests that constant small abuses of power have the same cumulative impact on mental health as big abuses such as physical abuse. A culture of small abuses lays the groundwork for bigger abuses so if you have a group home where people are constantly patronized and treated like children, it's a smaller step to taking control of their money in order to help and then outright financial abuse.

Power is not always used to harm people, it can also be used for good. It's useful to consider the concepts of "power to" versus "power over". Abuse has many different faces and can be physical, sexual financial, emotional, verbal, and neglectful. People are most at risk of abuse when their capacity to be autonomous is at its weakest such as in childhood, in old age, and also people who are disabled. Research shows that women and children are the most likely victims of abuse and men are the most likely perpetrators. However, the potential for women with power to perpetrate abuse against at-risk groups should not be overlooked.

The role of bystanders in abusive situations is also important. In disability and aged care workplaces, a worker who is aware of abuse by someone else but does nothing about it can be considered complicit in that abuse by not taking steps to stop it. Understanding the systemic and individual nature of power and abuse in disability and aged care settings is vital for undertaking your support role. Take time to consider how you would recognize and respond to abuse and work to prevent at-risk people you work with from abuse and abuses of power.