

# Changes in pattern of elderly abuse during COVID-19 pandemic

CTW Ip, YF Shea, HWF Chan, KHJ Luk

Division of Geriatrics, Department of Medicine, Queen Mary Hospital

## Abstract

The prevalence of elder abuse (EA) has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from Social Welfare Department was reviewed and the number of EA, the types of abuse, and the perpetrator-victim relationship during the pandemic in 2020 were compared with the pre-pandemic data (2014 to 2019). It was found that the total number of EA did not increase during the pandemic in Hong Kong. There was proportionately more physical abuse (70.5% vs. 65.9%) but less financial abuse (9.8% vs. 16.2%). There were proportionately more spouses as perpetrators (61.8% vs. 54.7%). Since the elderly are vulnerable to deprivation and abuse, clinicians should be alerted to subtle body language or comments made by patients or caregivers and signs of abuse.

## Methodology

As all EA cases must be reported to the Social Welfare Department, the data on EA in Hong Kong was retrieved and reviewed retrospectively.<sup>5</sup> The number of EA, types of abuse, and the perpetrator-victim relationship during the pandemic in 2020 with the pre-pandemic data (2014 to 2019) were compared using chi-square statistics.

## Discussion

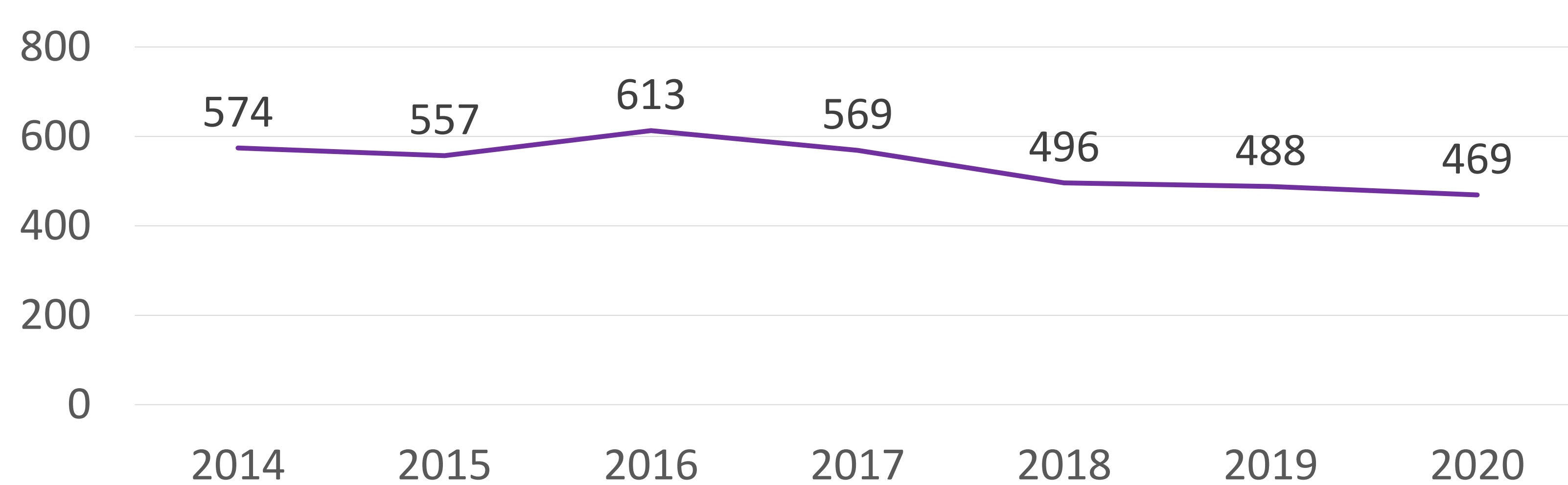
The total number of EA in Hong Kong did not increase during the pandemic. There was proportionately more physical abuse but less financial abuse during the pandemic as compared with the pre-pandemic period. There were proportionately more spouses as perpetrators.

Owing to social isolation, there was little opportunity for caregivers to alleviate their stress. Cutting down local community support rendered spouses vulnerable to caregiver burnout as they had to spend extended time in caregiving. The pent-up frustrations could have led to the increase in physical abuse. On the other hand, the decrease in financial abuse could be related to the shortened business hours of banking services, which hindered elderly's financial access, as they were less likely to use e-banking. Moreover, older people were vulnerable to poverty in times of pandemic due to loss of jobs and working hours, they become less appealing for financial abuse.

## Conclusion

There is a change in the pattern of EA in Hong Kong during the COVID-19 pandemic.

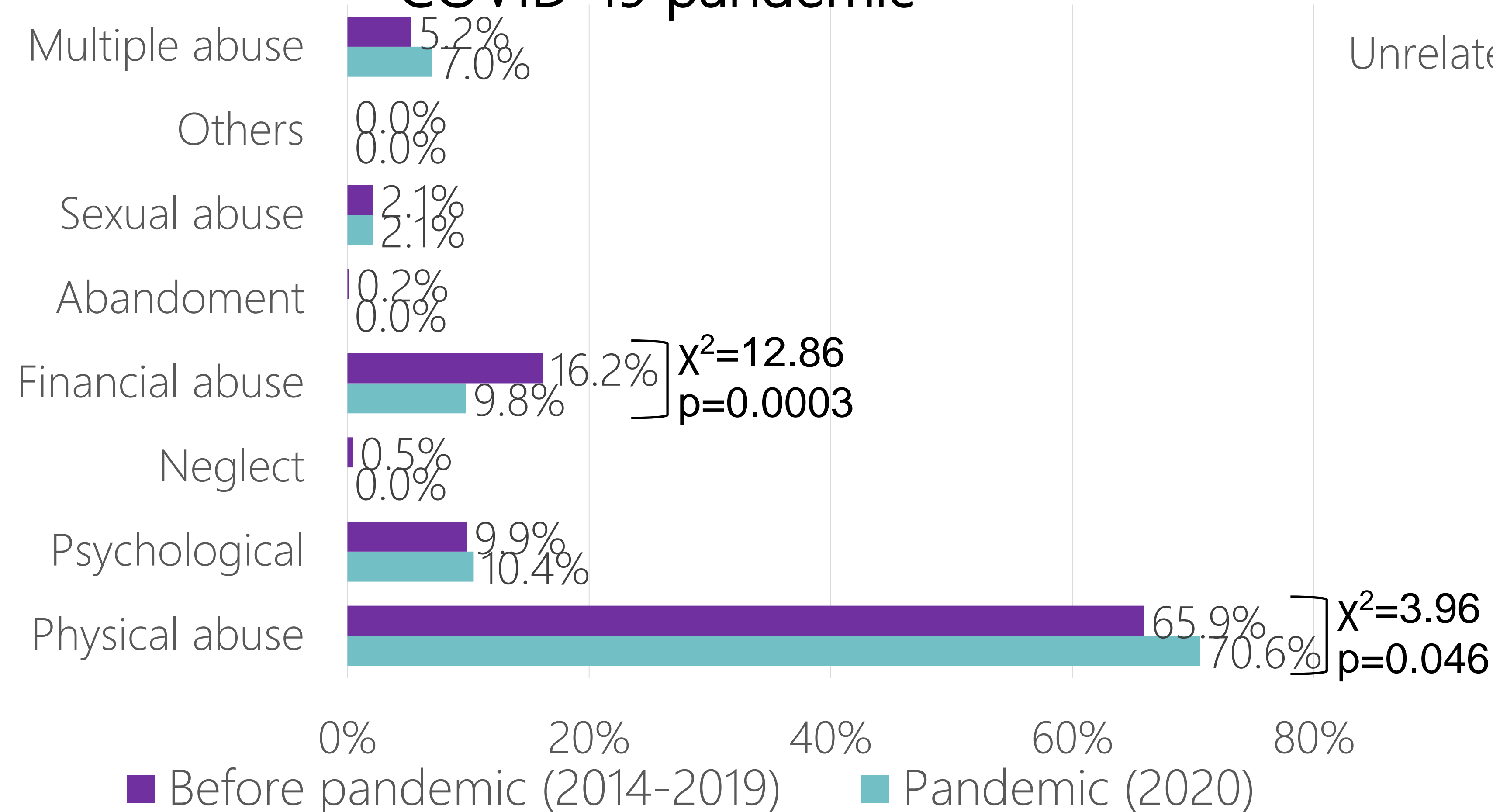
**Total number of elder abuse from 2014 to 2020**



## Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most people needed to work from home and there were limited social or recreational activities. An increase in time spent living with elderly relatives would create additional stress to caregivers and thus lead to increase in EA during the pandemic.<sup>1-4</sup> Previous studies have reported an increase in the prevalence of EA of 21.3% during the pandemic, as compared with 11.6% during the pre-pandemic period.<sup>1,3</sup> However published data on the change in the pattern of EA has been limited.<sup>1</sup>

**Types of elder abuse during vs. before COVID-19 pandemic**



**Perpetrator-victim relationship during vs. before COVID-19 pandemic**

