



What would you do?

Brief for June 2017 theme for the localisation of the National Awareness Campaign 'What Would You Do?'

Elder Abuse

The National Awareness Campaign as part of the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021



What is Elder Abuse?

On May 3 2017, the Irish Times reported that there had been up to thirty domestic violence applications heard by judges sitting at the Dublin District Family Courts, following the May bank holiday weekend break. While this article exposed how domestic violence is still a major problem in Irish society, it also revealed a feature of domestic violence that is often overlooked. The article referred to two of the thirty applications for protection orders that were made by older persons, in their seventies, who were seeking protection orders against their adult children.

Domestic abuse is described as “*the use of physical or emotional force or the threat of violence, including sexual violence in close adult relationships, in order to control the victim*”. The two elderly people who featured in the aforementioned Irish Times article are part of a group in Irish society, who suffer domestic abuse in their homes, and the abuse often goes unnoticed. They are older people who suffer abuse by their adult children, or other people with whom they would expect to be able to trust. This type of domestic abuse is also known as elder abuse.

Elder abuse is defined as “*A single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person or violates their human and civil rights.*” (Protecting our Future, Report of the Working Group on Elder Abuse, September 2002). 65 years of age is taken as the point beyond which abuse may be considered elder abuse.

According to the 2014 report by the HSE Elder Abuse Service, Open Your Eyes, of the reported cases of elder abuse, where there was place of residence data, 83% happened in the victim’s home, 7% in a private nursing home, 4% in a relative’s home and 4% in public continuing care.

What forms can Elder Abuse take?

There are several forms of abuse, which may result from deliberate intent, neglect, thoughtlessness or ignorance.

Psychological abuse, including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks.

Financial abuse, including theft; fraud; exploitation; pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance, or financial transactions; or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

Physical abuse, including slapping, pushing, hitting, kicking, misuse of medication, inappropriate restraint (including physical and chemical restraint) or sanctions.

Neglect and acts of omission, including ignoring medical or physical care needs and withholding the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

Sexual abuse, including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the older adult has not consented, or could not consent, or with which he or she was compelled to consent.



What is Elder Abuse?

Domestic Violence can also be a form of elder abuse. It refers to the use of physical or emotional force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships. Domestic violence can happen to men or women at any stage of their lives.

Institutional Abuse, which may include poor care standards, lack of positive responses to complex needs, rigid routines, inadequate staffing, and poor staff knowledge of patients or their needs.

How big is the problem?

A report by the National Centre for the Protection of Older People, Abuse and Neglect of Older People in Ireland (2010), provided the first national prevalence study on the extent of elder abuse and neglect amongst community-dwelling older people. The overall prevalence of elder abuse and neglect in the previous 12 months was 2.2%. This suggests that over 10,000 people over the age of 65 years experience mistreatment in a 12-month period in the Republic of Ireland. When this is broadened out to quantify the number of older people experiencing abuse in the community since turning 65 years of age this increases to 4%.

According to the 2014 report by the HSE Elder Abuse Service, *Open Your Eyes*, the HSE Elder Abuse Service received over 2,590 referrals of alleged cases of elder abuse in 2014. In 2014, psychological abuse was the most frequently reported form of abuse at 29%, followed by financial abuse (21%), self-neglect (21%), neglect (15%) physical abuse (12%), sexual abuse (1%) and discrimination (1%).

Elder Abuse has now been integrated into Safeguarding of Vulnerable persons as a policy direction by state agencies such as the HSE and various Non Governmental Organisations. There is a National Safeguarding Committee which is intersectoral and is made up of representatives from relevant State agencies and NGOs. The National Safeguarding Committee in 2016 commissioned a Red C poll into public attitudes to abuse of vulnerable adults including older people.

Among the poll findings are:

- Physical abuse of vulnerable adults has been witnessed/suspected by 1 in 3 adults, very often in the home.
- Over 1 in 3 of those surveyed has experienced or someone close to them has experienced emotional abuse.
- Almost 2 in 5 (38%) think vulnerable adults are badly treated. One in three believes vulnerable adult abuse to be widespread.
- There is significant public concern about the need to safeguard those who are limited in their ability to protect themselves.
- There is a lack of clarity over where to report vulnerable adult maltreatment, particularly among the young



What is Elder Abuse?

A follow up public awareness campaign is being taken by the National Safeguarding Committee during 2017 to highlight the issue of abuse of vulnerable adults in Ireland. The campaign will run from Monday 5 June for 3 weeks and will feature national radio, print and online advertising.

The World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is on Thursday 15 June 2017.

Who might abuse?

A wide range of people may abuse older people, including relatives and family members, professional staff, paid care workers, volunteers, other service users, neighbours, friends and associates. The 2014 Open Your Eye's report found that 49% of the alleged perpetrators were adult children, 19% were a partner/ husband or wife, and 15% were an 'other' relative. Additionally, 8% were a neighbour friend, 5% related to landlord/lodger concerns and 4% for carer/staff.

Where might abuse occur?

Abuse can take place in any context. It may occur when an older person lives alone or with a relative; it may occur within residential or day-care settings, in hospitals, home support services and other places assumed to be safe, or in public places.

Patterns of abuse and abusing vary and reflect different circumstances:

- Long-term abuse, in the context of an ongoing family relationship, such as domestic violence or sexual abuse between spouses or generations.
- Opportunistic abuse, such as theft occurring because money has been left around.
- Situational abuse, which arises because pressures have built up and/or because of the difficult or challenging behaviour of the older person.
- Neglect of a person's needs because those around him or her are not able to be responsible for their care; for example if the carer has difficulties because of debt, alcohol or mental health problems.
- Unacceptable 'treatments' or 'programmes', which include sanctions or punishment, such as the withholding of food and drink, seclusion, the unnecessary and unauthorised use of control and restraint, or the over, or under, use of medication.
- Racist, ageist and other discriminatory practices by staff, including ageism, racism and other discriminatory practices, which may be attributable to the lack of appropriate guidance.
- Misappropriation of benefits and/or use of the person's money by other members of the household or by care staff.
- Fraud or intimidation in connection with wills, property or other assets



How to spot the signs of elder abuse

How to recognise if an Older Person is being abused?

Most older people do not experience abuse. However, an older person can be harmed or abused in many ways. An older person may experience more than one form of abuse at any given time.

If you suspect that an older person may be experiencing any of the feelings or effects outlined below then you may need to speak with a GP, Public Health Nurse or Senior Case Worker or contact the HSE Information line on 1850 24 1850.

'Protecting our Future', the report of the Working Group on Elder Abuse, published in September 2002, outlined the following possible indicators of elder abuse.

PSYCHOLOGICAL	NEGLECT	FINANCIAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demoralisation • Depression • Feelings of hopefulness or helplessness • Disrupted appetite or sleeping pattern • Tearfulness • Excessive fears • Agitation • Resignation • Confusion • Unexplained paranoia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehydration • Malnutrition • Inappropriate clothing • Poor hygiene • Unkempt appearance • Under or over medicated • Unattended medical needs • Exposure to danger or lack of supervision • Absence of required aids, including reading glasses, dentures • Pressure sores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills • Unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from accounts • Funds diverted for someone else's use • Being charged for unsolicited work or significantly overcharged for work • Disparity between living conditions and assets • Extraordinary interest by family member in persons assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises or cuts, (particularly to mouth, lips, gums, eyes, ears) • Abrasions • Scratches • Burns (inflicted by cigarettes, matches, rope, iron, immersion in hot water) • Sprains • Dislocations • Fractures • Hair loss (possible hair-pulling) • Missing teeth • Eye injuries (black eye) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma about the genitals, breasts, rectum, mouth. • Injury to face, neck, chest, abdomen, thighs, buttocks • Presence of sexually transmitted disease



What to do if you suspect someone is suffering elder abuse

What to do if elder abuse is suspected?

In an emergency, where the person is at immediate risk, you should contact the Garda Síochána or emergency services on 999 or 112. If you are concerned about a person you suspect might be a victim of elder abuse, tell someone. You can contact the HSE Elder Abuse Service, your GP, Public Health Nurse, local Health Centre or An Garda Síochána.

- The HSE has dedicated Safeguarding and Protection Teams in place all over the country to take reports of elder abuse and provide help. Go to the following link for a list of Senior Case Workers in your area and their contact details:

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/safeguardingTeams>

HSE Information Line

Monday to Saturday, 8am-8pm

Call Save: 1850 24 1850

Website: <http://www.hse.ie/safeguarding>

Email: info@hse.ie

- The Senior Helpline is a national confidential telephone helpline for older people, provided by trained older volunteers. You can also contact the Senior Helpline at the number below:

LoCall: 1850 440 444

7 days a week, 10am –10pm

Website: <http://www.thirdageireland.ie/senior-helpline>

Email: info@thirdageireland.ie

- For a full list of services available to those suffering from elder abuse, go to this page: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/elderabuse/Resources1/>

- Links to:

[Red C Survey for the National Safeguarding Committee - Vulnerable Adults in Irish Society, December 2016](#)

[Infographic - Vulnerable Adults in Irish Society, December 2016](#)

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has a dedicated and comprehensive section of their website dedicated to elder abuse. Much of the material in this brief has been adapted, with thanks, from <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/elderabuse/>
