

For support and / or further information

Age Action

Call 01-4756989
Monday to Friday
9am – 1pm and 2pm - 5pm
Website: www.ageaction.ie
Email: library@ageaction.ie

HSE Dedicated Social Work Service for the Protection of Older People

Call: 1850 24 1850
Monday to Saturday 8am to 8pm
Website: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/elderabuse/>
Email: info@hse.ie

You will be provided with the details of the HSE staff in your local area who can help you.
More information on elder abuse is also available from the HSE Website

Alzheimer Society of Ireland

National Alzheimer Helpline
1800 341 341
Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm
Website: www.alzheimer.ie
Email: helpline@alzheimer.ie

Senior Help Line

Lo-call 1850 440 444
Daily from 10am-4pm and 7pm -10pm
Website: www.seniorhelpline.ie
Email: info@seniorhelpline.ie

The Carers Association

National Careline Freefone
1800 24 07 24
Monday to Friday, 9.30am – 5.00pm
Website: www.carersireland.com
Email: info@carersireland.com

ADA Campaign, HelpAge International,

Website: www.helpage.org
Email: info@helpage.org

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Disclaimer note:

The contents of this booklet are intended to enhance awareness of elder abuse and are provided as an information guide only. We have made every effort to ensure the material in this publication is accurate, however no responsibility is accepted by, nor liability assumed by or on behalf of the participating organisations.

Elder Abuse

Protecting the rights of older people against violence and abuse

AgeAction
For all older people

Introduction

Elder abuse has become an issue of growing prominence with an increasing population of 65 years and over. There is an emerging consensus that elder abuse is a human rights issue. Human rights are universal rights that belong to all people, regardless of national origin, race, culture, age, gender, or anything else (Ife, J. 2008. Human Rights and Social Work: Towards Rights-Based Practice). Everybody has the right to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life" (EU Charter of fundamental rights, Art. 25.). Elder abuse deprives old people of this right.

Age Action Ireland is advocating that the Irish government support a new Convention to protect the rights of older people.

Defining Elder Abuse

There are varying definitions of elder abuse. In Ireland, 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 2002, p. 25)

Did you know?

- In 2010 research by the National Centre for the Protection of Older People found that 10,200 older people had been abused in the previous 12 months and 18,700 older people had experienced elder abuse at some time since they turned 65.
- The number of people who report elder abuse to the HSE or to the Gardai is much smaller than the number who experience abuse. In many cases the older person doesn't tell anybody.
- Elder abuse can be intentional, when someone sets out to be abusive. Sometimes it can also be unintentional where the person does not realise that the consequence of their actions can be deeply distressing to the older person.
- Elder abuse most often occurs where the older person lives - in their home or in a care setting.
- There are many reasons why someone may not report abuse - out of fear and/or uncertainty of the outcome. However, support and help is available (see resources section of this leaflet).

'Open Your Eyes' an information booklet on Elder Abuse from the HSE identifies six different types of elder abuse:

- **Physical Abuse** includes hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, or inappropriate restraint
- **Financial or material abuse** includes theft, fraud or exploitation; pressure in connection with wills, power of attorney, property, inheritance or financial transactions; or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits
- **Psychological abuse** includes emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, intimidation or coercion
- **Neglect and acts of omission** include ignoring medical or physical care needs; failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services; the withholding of medication, adequate nutrition or heating
- **Sexual Abuse** includes sexual assault or sexual acts to which an older person has not consented
- **Discriminatory Abuse** includes ageism, racism, sexism, that based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.

Human Rights and Elder Abuse

Using human rights to frame issues affecting older people changes the way older people are viewed, from those in need of charity or services to human beings with rights. Freedom from violence and abuse is one of the core rights under international human rights law. However there is no specific article dealing with freedom from violence and abuse for older people as we do not have an international Convention on the Rights of Older People.

A Convention on the Rights of Older People

At the UN member states are currently discussing whether such a Convention should be drafted. Age Action is advocating for the Irish government to support a new Convention as it could ensure that the government, should it ratify it, introduce specific legislation criminalising elder abuse in Ireland as well as mandatory reporting of suspected abuse or neglect.

It could also ensure that staff in nursing homes receives training in elder abuse, which currently is not obligatory, and could assist in closing the gaps in the legal powers the HSE and HIQA has to prevent and respond to abuse, exploitation or neglect of residents in nursing homes, e.g. HIQA currently cannot legally inspect private nursing homes.

As well as the issue of elder abuse a new Convention would also detail how human rights law deals with a whole raft of other issues affecting older people, e.g. income security and support for older people in care settings.

Age Action is taking part in HelpAge International's Age Demands Action campaign which is advocating for a Convention on the Rights of Older People. For more information see www.helpage.org