

Elder Abuse

The Health Sector Role in Prevention and Response



Elder abuse is a hidden problem.

1 in 6 older adults worldwide
have been abused in the past year.



World Health
Organization

What is elder abuse?

It's the abuse and neglect of older people. **It takes many forms.**



Physical abuse

- Hitting, pushing, kicking
- Inappropriate use of drugs or restraints



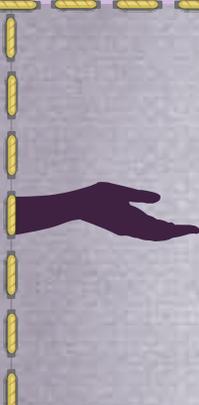
Psychological or emotional abuse

- Insults, threats, humiliation, controlling behavior, confinement and isolation



Sexual abuse

- Sexual contact without consent



Financial exploitation

- Misusing or stealing a person's money or assets



Neglect or abandonment

- Not providing food, housing, or medical care

Elder abuse **can happen just once or repeatedly.**

People who commit elder abuse are **often in a position of trust.**



Family members



Health care workers

Elder abuse is **common**.



Elder abuse can happen **at home**.

- 90% of all abusers are family members.
- Most abusers are adult children, spouses and partners.



Elder abuse can also happen **in institutions**.

- Nursing homes
- Long-term care facilities



Data about elder abuse in hospitals, nursing homes, and other long-term facilities is scarce. **But a survey of nursing home staff in the United States suggests that rates may be high.**

Many staff members had seen elder abuse or committed it:

- 36%** witnessed physical abuse
- 10%** committed physical abuse
- 40%** committed psychological abuse

But only **4%** of elder abuse is reported. Why?

Older people may:



Fear retaliation



Worry about getting the abuser in trouble



Be mentally incapable



Feel ashamed or embarrassed

In many countries, older people have nowhere to turn for help — because **there are limited systems in place to address elder abuse.**

Elder abuse has **devastating consequences.**

It has **physical effects.**

It has **psychological effects.**



Injuries



Lasting disabilities



Anxiety



Loneliness



Worsened health conditions



Loss of dignity, trust, and hope

One study from the United States tracked older people over 13 years and found:

Victims of elder abuse were twice as likely to die compared to older people who did not report abuse.

Elder abuse has **high costs.**



In the United States:

US\$5.3 billion

each year in medical costs from violent injuries to older people

What are the risk factors for **committing** elder abuse?



What are the risk factors for **suffering** elder abuse?



Older people with dementia are at special risk.

As many as **2 out of 3** people with dementia have been abused.

But elder abuse doesn't only happen to the frail and sick.
It can happen to any older person.

Elder abuse is **preventable** – and everyone has a role to play.

We can help ensure that older people live in safety – **without fear of being hurt, exploited, or neglected.**



The public can:

- ✓ Watch for signs of elder abuse
- ✓ Learn how to get help and report abuse



Older people can:

- ✓ Stay connected to family and friends
- ✓ Learn more about their rights
- ✓ Use professional services for support where available
- ✓ Make sure their financial and legal affairs are in order



Family and informal caregivers can lower their risk of committing abuse by learning ways to cope:

- ✓ Get help from family or friends
- ✓ Take breaks
- ✓ Get support from local health and social services

The health sector can help stop elder abuse in communities, hospitals, and institutions.



There are promising strategies, such as developing:

- ✓ Professional awareness campaigns to help health care workers recognize elder abuse
- ✓ Caregiver support to reduce stress
- ✓ Caregiver training on dementia
- ✓ Residential care policies to define and improve standards of care



However, most nations report that they still **don't have formal action plans to address elder abuse.**

A recent survey of 133 countries found that:

Only **40%** had national plans

Only **17%** had a national survey

We also need more research about elder abuse — its risk factors, consequences, and solutions — especially in low- and middle-income countries.

Around the world, **governments can do more to address and prevent elder abuse.** The health sector can:

1

Raise awareness within the health sector and other sectors about the health and social burden of elder abuse

2

Recognize elder abuse as a public health problem and establish a focal point to address elder abuse

3

Develop and test evidence-based interventions to prevent elder abuse

4

Provide services to victims of elder abuse

5

Collaborate with other sectors to address elder abuse, such as criminal justice, health, and social services



Support World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June

Get involved —
contact your local ageing
services organization

Raise awareness —
talk with friends, family
and colleagues

WHO Resources:

- Global status report on violence prevention 2014
- Violence prevention: the evidence
- WHO Department for Management of NCDs, Disability, Violence, and Injury Prevention (http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/en/)



Design by
Communicate Health

www.communicatehealth.com

WHO/NMH/NVI/16.5 © WHO, 2016.

All rights reserved.