

Queen's Park Trust

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Elder Abuse

Our Neighbourhood Watch network is a group of people united by a common goal of looking out for each other.

We know that so many of you go the extra mile to help your neighbours stay safe.

Elder abuse can take many forms, including **financial, emotional, physical and sexual** and some examples of abuse can be:

- stealing or pressurising someone to hand over money
- making decisions without consulting the person involved
- treating someone in a way that makes them feel threatened, belittled or embarrassed
- touching someone in a way they don't want to be touched
- physically hurting someone
- neglecting someone's needs.

Often these abuses are also crimes.

What is Elder Abuse?

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.

Abuse is any action that violates a person's human or civil rights. It can take many forms and involve a number of factors. Hourglass defines the abuse of older people 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.

Financial abuse

Financial abuse is where someone in a position of trust interferes in an older person's ability to acquire, use or maintain their finances. It is always a crime but not always prosecuted.

For example:

- An abuser might exploit an older person by making demands for large transfers.
 - An abuser might control an older person's access to financial resources by refusing to let them access a bank account.
 - An abuser might sabotage an older person's ability to maintain financial security by building up debt in their name.
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What are the signs of financial abuse/harm?

- Signatures on cheques and documents that do not resemble the older person's signature, or signed when the older person cannot write.
- Sudden changes in bank accounts, including unexplained withdrawals of large sums of money by a person accompanying the older person.
- The inclusion of additional names on an older person's bank account.
- Abrupt changes to or the sudden establishment of wills.
- The sudden appearance of previously absent relatives claiming their rights to an older person's affairs or possessions.
- Someone moving into an older person's house and living rent free, without agreement or under duress.
- The unexplained sudden transfer of assets to a family member or someone outside the family.
- Misuse of power of attorney, deputyship, appointeeship or other legal authority.
- Numerous unpaid bills, or overdue rent, when someone else is supposed to be paying the bills.
- Lack of amenities, such as TV, personal grooming items, appropriate clothing, that the older person should be able to afford.
- The unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions such as art, silverware, or jewellery.
- Deliberate isolation of an older person from friends and family, resulting in the caregiver alone having total control.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves any non-consensual sexual act or activity perpetrated against an older person. Such acts can include rape or attempted rape, sexual assault, involving an older person in making or viewing sexual imagery against their wishes, indecent exposure, inappropriate sexual harassment, sexual teasing, innuendo, or non-consensual masturbation.

“Sexual abuse of older people is rarely discussed and this is reflected on our Hourglass helpline where calls pertaining to sexual abuse make up just 2-3% of cases. It is nevertheless a wide-spread reality.”

Despite the lack of research into this often-hidden form of abuse, studies suggest that:

- Rape is the most common sexual offence committed against older people.
 - Sexual abuse of older people is primarily committed against women.
 - Most perpetrators are known to the victim.
 - The vast majority of incidents occur in the victim's home, with 20% of cases occurring in residential homes.
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What are the signs of sexual abuse?

- Bruises around the breasts or genital area.
 - Unexplained venereal disease or genital infections.
 - Unexplained vaginal or anal bleeding.
 - Difficulty in walking or standing.
 - Sudden or dramatic changes in behaviour.
 - Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
 - An older person telling you they have been sexually assaulted or raped.
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If you suspect sexual abuse:

- Make immediate contact with emergency services (999).
- Do not wash the older person or their clothing.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse involves threats of harm, bullying and harassment and other behaviours or acts of coercive control which deliberately try to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore an older person. Such abuse can also relate to acts that may contravene the human rights of older people, such as the restriction or prevention of older people meeting their religious or cultural needs.

“It is rare for psychological abuse to happen in isolation and often it is linked to other forms of abuse or harm.”

What are the signs of psychological abuse?

Psychological abuse can have a profound impact on someone’s mental health. Victims can feel trapped, threatened, humiliated, used, or a combination of all these. Most signs therefore relate to someone’s mental state, and changes in behaviour:

- Helplessness.
- Hesitation to talk openly.
- Implausible stories.
- Confusion or disorientation.
- Anger without apparent cause.
- Sudden change in behaviour.
- Emotionally upset or agitated.
- Unusual behaviour (sucking, biting, or rocking).
- Unexplained fear.
- Denial of a situation.
- Extremely withdrawn and non-communicative or non-responsive.
- An older person telling you they are being verbally or emotionally abused.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any intentional act or behaviour causing injury, trauma or other physical suffering or bodily harm. This includes instances of fabricated or induced illness or causing an older person to become unwell.

“The behaviours of physical abuse can range from slapping and hitting, inappropriate use of restraint, forcible feeding, scalding and burning, through to the prescription or administration of medication not licensed for the purpose used. The signs of physical abuse are often evident, but can also be hidden by the perpetrator or the victim.

There can be a perception that residential homes are the sole site for physical abuse of older people, however a majority of physical abuse incidents occur in the victim’s own home perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members. Here, the abuse of older people coincides with domestic abuse.”

What are the signs of physical abuse?

- Cuts, lacerations, puncture wounds, open wounds, bruises, welts, discolouration, black eyes, burns, bone fractures, broken bones, and skull fractures.
- Untreated injuries in various stages of healing or not properly treated.
- Poor skin condition or poor skin hygiene.
- Dehydration and/or malnourished without illness-related cause.
- Loss of weight.
- Soiled clothing or bed.
- Broken eyeglasses/frames, physical signs of being subjected to punishment, or signs of being restrained.
- Inappropriate use of medication, overdosing or under-dosing.
- An older person telling you they have been hit, slapped, kicked, or mistreated.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse, or domestic violence, is any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality.

Domestic abuse and the abuse of older people are coinciding concepts. An incident of domestic violence may constitute the abuse of an older person and vice versa.

Therefore the signs of abuse can be seen in acts of financial, psychological, sexual and physical abuse as well as neglect. Older people are at risk of all forms of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse affects people of all ages. However, older victims' experiences often differ to those of younger people, due to a variety of social, cultural and physical factors that require attention.

- For older victims, family members rather than intimate partners are most often the perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- Older women often feel expected to protect the family unit by staying with the abuser, and may fear losing relationships with adult children, family, and friends.
- For many older victims, abuse may become normalised and accepted, which can create barriers to getting help and support.
- Older victims may experience a decline in physical and cognitive health and become dependent on their abuser for support.
- In some cases older victims may also provide a caring role for their abuser which also impacts on their willingness to leave an abusive relationship.
- Ageist media and political campaigns against domestic abuse that predominantly focus on young women and children and erase the voices of older victims can contribute to barriers for older people reporting abuse and seeking help.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a person deliberately withholds, or fails to provide, suitable and adequate care and support needed by an older person. It may be through a lack of knowledge or awareness, or through a deliberate decision not to act when they know the older person in their care needs help. Neglect can negatively impact the health and well-being of an older person.

What are the signs of neglect?

- Dirt, faecal or urine smell, or other health and safety hazards in older person's living environment.
- Rashes, sores, or lice on the older person.
- The older person is inadequately clothed.
- The older person is malnourished or dehydrated.
- The older person has an untreated medical condition.
- The older person has poor personal hygiene.

- There is evidence of the withholding of medication or over-medication of the older person.
- There is evidence of a lack of assistance with eating and drinking.
- There are unsanitary and unclean conditions.

Why does abuse happen?

Abuse of older people is a phenomenon that takes many different forms. Abuse is an expression of power and control, exercised by the perpetrator – individual(s) and/or institutions – over the victim.

“Abuse can occur as a spontaneous act, where the perpetrator takes advantage of a situation, or as a premeditated and calculated act. At base, these forms of abuse stem from the real or perceived vulnerability of older people.”

Abuse of older people can take the form of domestic abuse. These manifestations of abuse are usually gender related and bear many similarities to the experiences of younger women. However, there are some notable ways in which domestic abuse can look different for older women:

- Older victims are more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member or current intimate partner.
- Older victims are less likely to attempt to leave the year before accessing help, and more likely to be living with the perpetrator after getting support.
- Older victims are significantly more likely to have a disability.

Abuse can occur as a result of prejudices, or through an environment that creates institutional attitudes and approaches that put older people at risk. Abuse in an institutional setting is more likely to occur in the situation where:

- Staff are poorly trained and poorly supervised.
- Inadequate funding of care provision, both by care providers and also by statutory commissioners of care.

“Abuse of older people can also be caused by the lack of knowledge and skills or external support for those in a position of trust. This can manifest in the neglect of older people. The impact of neglect is significant and is a form of abuse regardless of motivation or intent.”

Risk factors:

Research has identified factors, individual and structural, which can increase the risk of abuse.

On the personal level factors may include:

- The intergenerational transmission of abuse.
- Stress.
- Dependency.
- Isolation.
- Communication difficulties.

However, age is an aspect of any person that interacts with their broader position in society. Although all older people can be victims of abuse, some older people are at greater risk. Data on these groups of older people is the hardest to come by, with low levels of reporting.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups:

There is currently no evidence which suggests a higher prevalence of the abuse of older people in minority groups. However, there is evidence to suggest that BAME older people face additional barriers to accessing service provision, putting older people more at risk. These barriers might be due to racism as an additional prejudice faced by BAME older people; poor understanding of cultural variation in attitudes to ageing; or immigration status limiting recourse to public funds.

LGBT+ older people:

LGBT+ older people face compounded layers of vulnerability. Increased risk might stem from homophobia, this is supported by accounts of older people going 'back in the closet' in institutional settings; from the impact of earlier experiences of abuse; or from specific health and care needs, particularly for transgender older people.

Disability:

A higher proportion of older people live with a disability than the general population. The Centre for Policy on Ageing (2016) found that 40% of older people aged 60, and 75% of those aged 80 and above have limitations on activities of daily living (disability). Increased risk of disabled older people might be because of the additional prejudice of ableism; increased likelihood of limited mobility; or the increased likelihood of complex care needs.

What to do about abuse

If you are concerned for myself:

Sometimes it is not easy to accept that you are a victim of abuse, and it can be very difficult to tell someone else. This can be because the person who is perpetrating the abuse is a close family member or a friend, someone you trust and care about.

Hourglass are there to help. You can call their helpline on 0808 808 8141, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. Trained and experienced staff and volunteers will listen to your concerns and provide suggestions and advice. The helpline is free to call and entirely confidential.

The number will not appear on your telephone bill.

They will always seek to respect your confidentiality, but there may be rare occasions when this is not possible (for example, if you or another person is in immediate danger).

You can also email them at helpline@wearehourglass.org

Things to think about:

If you feel that you might be at risk of abuse you should consider the following actions, which might help to reduce that risk:

- Maintain contact with any friends or neighbours that you trust.
- Keep in contact with those friends and neighbours if you move to a new address.
- Encourage friends to visit you at home and try to join a local group or club.
- Have regular medical or dental appointments. Dentists and GP's are people who you can talk to about abuse.
- If you have to rely on others to post your own mail then try to use more than one person.

- Talk to a lawyer about arrangements that you can make for the future management of your property, possessions or money.
 - No one should keep from you the details of your finances or property management.
 - Check documents with someone independent of the issue before signing.
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If you are concerned for someone else:

If you are worried an older person is at risk or being abused, it is important to act. You can call adult social services or Age UK or the Hourglass helpline (0808 808 8141) to get advice and support on how to help.

Try to speak to them about what you have noticed, being as open and honest as possible. Give them the opportunity to talk and listen carefully to what they tell you, offering to seek help if that is appropriate.

Things to think about:

- Be sensitive to the emotional impact of disclosing about abuse.
- Stay calm if an older person begins disclosing.
- Do not falsely promise confidentiality, accounts of abuse might affect more than one person, and you may have a responsibility to tell someone.
- Where appropriate, explain the different people who might be able to help, such as health or social care professionals, police, home carers, care home employees or volunteers and advocates.
- Where appropriate, approach one of these people yourself and ask what action might be taken.
- Bear in mind the potential stigma towards abuse, consider whether the older person in question is comfortable talking to someone from their own community or family.
- If you work in health or social care, speak to your line manager immediately.

For more information visit [the Hourglass website](#) to find out more or call their freephone helpline: 0808 808 8141.