

# HSE receives 8,000 reports of abuse or neglect of adults

**COLM KEENA**

Legal Affairs Correspondent

Almost 8,000 cases of adults suffering suspected abuse or neglect were reported to the Health Service Executive last year. It is the first time national figures for suspected abuse of both elderly people and vulnerable adults have been collected and published.

Officials believe the figures under-represent the extent of abuse, with a very low rate of cases being reported by families, carers, home helps, gardai and GPs.

A survey conducted last year found that one in three people believe that the abuse of vulnerable people is "widespread".

Up to now, only national figures on elder abuse were made available. More than half of the reports received last year were for vulnerable adults aged 18-64. The most common types of reported abuse were physical (48 per cent), psychological (24 per cent) and sexual (11 per cent).

For those over 65, the most common types of reported abuse were psychological (27 per cent), physical (22 per cent) and financial (21 per cent). The last category involves situations where someone is given charge of the finances of an adult. Other types of abuse include neglect, institutional abuse and self-neglect.

In total 7,884 reports of suspected abuse were received by the HSE last year. In 47 per cent of cases it was decided there were reasonable grounds for taking action. In 31 per cent no grounds for action were found and in 22 per cent of cases it was decided that fur-

ther inquiries should be made.

The figures were released by the National Safeguarding Committee, which was established in 2014 to bring greater focus on the issue of the abuse of vulnerable adults.

Vulnerable adults include people with dementia, mental-health problems, physical disability or intellectual disability. National Safeguarding Committee chairwoman Patricia Rickard Clarke said the figures showed a worrying prevalence of adult abuse.

## Public understanding

"There is a lack of public understanding as to what actually constitutes abuse and what safeguarding means for vulnerable adults who are most at risk. This is shown in that families and individuals reported relatively few cases," she said.

Most reports came from service providers and nurses.

"These are abuses of people's liberties and rights - including vulnerable people who lack capacity," Ms Rickard Clarke said.

A particular area of concern is financial abuse. She believed the figures released are "just the tip of the iceberg". Once permission to manage a vulnerable person's money is handed over to someone else, there is no monitoring as to how that money is then spent and allocated.

"The majority of people are honourable, but figures suggest that in up to 20 per cent of cases, financial abuse occurs."

A support number has been established by the national safeguarding office at 061-461 358 which the public can call for advice and to be directed to the appropriate services.

# 8,000 claims of adult abuse

Joyce Fegan

Almost 8,000 claims of adult abuse or neglect have been made to the HSE.

The 7,884 alleged incidences include physical, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse of people aged between 18 and 64.

All of these claims of abuse were made to the HSE in 2016 and it is the first time that such figures have been recorded.

Physical abuse was the most common allegation, at 48%, followed by psychological, at 24% and sexual, at 11%.

For adults over the age of 65, psychological abuse was the most commonly reported form of abuse, at 27%, followed by physical abuse, at 22%, and financial abuse, at 21%.

The figures have been released as the National Safeguarding Committee (NSC) begins a nationwide campaign to increase public understanding of what constitutes abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults.

Vulnerable adults include people who have dementia, mental health problems, or a physical or intellectual disability.

Voluntary agencies made the highest volume of disclosures to the HSE — 38% of claims were made by a representative voluntary body, 26% came from a public or general health nurse, and just 4% were made by families.

NSC chairwoman Patricia Rickard-Clarke said that the

## Adult abuse s

- 7,884: total of reported concerns of adult abuse or neglect in 2016 made to the HSE;
- 48: percentage of claims related to physical abuse;
- 24: percentage of claims related to psychological abuse;
- 11: volume of claims of sexual abuse;
- 27: percentage of claims of psychological abuse - the most common for those aged over 65;
- 22: percentage of concerns in connection to physical abuse for those over 64;
- 26: percentage of claims came from a general or public health nurse;
- 4: percentage of claims came from a family member;
- 2: percentage of cases reported by those experiencing the alleged abuse;
- 1 in 3:- number who believe "vulnerable adult abuse" is widespread.

HSE figures represent a worrying prevalence of adult abuse.

"There is a lack of public understanding as to what actually constitutes abuse, and what safeguarding means for vulnerable adults, who are those most at risk," said Ms Rickard-Clarke said.

"This is shown in that families and individuals reported relatively few cases."

The committee's national awareness campaign will draw attention to the fact that over-medicating a person is "not OK", said the NSC chairwoman.

"This aim of the National Safeguarding Committee campaign is to show that taking money to cover care expenses without a person's knowledge, over-medicating, or locking someone in a room while going out is not OK," said Ms Rickard-Clarke.

"These are abuses of people's liberties and rights — including vulnerable people who lack capacity."

Ms Rickard-Clarke also highlighted financial abuse as a "particular area of concern".

She said that while most people who have permission to manage a vulnerable person's finances are "honourable", figures show that financial abuse occurs in up to 20% of cases.

"We need a transparent tracking system, which accounts for the uses of the finances of people who have reduced capacity," said Ms Rickard-Clarke.

Tim Hanly, who is the general manager of the HSE's National Safeguarding Office, said the release of the figures should see a spike in the number of abuse cases being reported.

■ A dedicated support number has been established by the HSE National Safeguarding Office, at (061) 461 358, which the public can call for advice and to receive direction to the most appropriate services.

# 8,000 ADULT ABUSE CASES

## New move to protect vulnerable people

**ALMOST 8,000 cases of physical, sexual and psychological abuse against adults were reported to the HSE in 2016, it has been revealed.**

The National Safeguarding Committee (NSC) yesterday released the figures from the HSE — the first time reported abuse of adults has been recorded.

Of the 7,884 concerns reported, the most common type among those aged 18-64 was physical (48 per cent), psychological (24 per cent) and sexual abuse (11 per cent).

And among people aged over 65, psychological abuse was highest at

■ Paul HEALY

27 per cent, followed by physical abuse (22 per cent) and financial abuse (21 per cent).

The figures were announced as the NSC began a nationwide campaign to increase public understanding of what constitutes abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults.

### **Risk**

National Safeguarding Committee Chairperson Patricia Rickard-Clarke said the HSE figures showed a worrying prevalence of adult abuse and a need for greater public awareness.

She said: "There is a lack of pub-

lic understanding as to what actually constitutes abuse and what safeguarding means for vulnerable adults who are those most at risk.

**"This aim of the National Safeguarding Committee campaign is to show that taking money to cover care expenses without a person's knowledge, over medicating, or locking someone in a room while going out is not OK."**

She added: "A particular area of concern is financial abuse. I believe that these figures are just the tip of the iceberg...The majority of people are honourable, but figures suggest that in up to 20 per cent of cases financial abuse occurs."

The National Safeguarding Office can be contacted at (061) 461 358.

# Elderly are being ripped off by their own loved-ones

By Naomi McElroy

CASES of elderly people being ripped off – often by family members – are on the rise, campaign group Age Action warned last night.

Its head of advocacy, Justin Moran, said that such frauds are difficult to detect and can even involve the elderly being forced to co-sign for loans.

He said: 'Financial abuse can be very hard to detect as it can take place between just two people.'

'For example, your mother gives you €200 to go to the shops but you keep the change, or you collect her pension but you withhold some of it for yourself. We're also seeing older people being forced to co-sign bank loans or mortgages.'

'While taking money is straightforward theft, forcing someone to co-sign a loan is a form of financial abuse that can be much harder to see.'

His remarks come as a report by the HSE's National Safeguarding Committee showed elderly people are at risk of psychological abuse, physical abuse and financial abuse.

The NSC said it received 7,884 reports last year of alleged abuse or



**Fear: Age Action's Justin Moran**

neglect concerning adults aged 18 to 64 and concerning those aged 65 or over. Of the oldest group, 21% of the complaints were about being ripped off; 22% were about assault or other physical harm and 27% were about psychological abuse.

National Safeguarding Committee chairman Patricia Rickard Clarke said adult abuse is worryingly preva-

lent and she said the scale of the problem could be worse.

She said: 'A particular area of concern is financial abuse. I believe these figures are just the tip of the iceberg.'

'Once permission to manage a vulnerable person's money is handed over to someone else, there is no monitoring as to how that money is then spent and allocated.'

'The majority of people are honourable, but figures suggest that in up to 20% of cases financial abuse occurs. The Department of Social

## **'Just the tip of the iceberg'**

Protection is currently looking at how to tackle financial abuse. This is to be welcomed.'

The figures were released by the NSC as part of its campaign to raise awareness of adult abuse and the need for stronger laws.

Of the 7,884 instances of abuse, 38% were reported to the HSE by voluntary agencies followed by 26% through nurses. Just 2% were reported by the victims.

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# Hell of Ireland's abused adults...

BY OWEN RYAN

**ALMOST 8,000 cases of suspected abuse or neglect of adults were reported to the HSE last year, but the real figure may be far higher.**

There are also concerns many people may not even realise certain behaviours are abusive.

Of 7,884 concerns passed on in 2016, the most common was physical abuse at 48%, followed by psychological at 24% and sexual at 11%.

National Safeguarding Committee chair Patricia Rickard Clarke said: "These are abuses of people's liberties and rights - including vulnerable people who lack capacity."

Among those

» 7,884 cases of suspected mistreatment

over 65 psychological abuse was highest at 27%, followed by physical at 22% and financial at 21%.

Worryingly, just 2% of cases were self reported and only 4% were reported by family members. Another 38% of complaints came from a representative voluntary agency, with 26% through general or public health

» Fears real figure may be much higher

nurses. Ms Clarke spoke out as the organisation began a nationwide campaign to increase public understanding of what constitutes abuse.

Vulnerable adults include people living with dementia, mental health problems, physical disability or intellectual disability.

Ms Clarke added: "It is shown that families and individuals reported relatively few cases."

"The aim of the campaign is to show that taking money to cover

care expenses without a person's knowledge, over-medicating, or locking someone in a room while going out is not OK."

She warned financial abuse is likely to be far higher than reported, adding: "I believe these figures are the tip of the iceberg."

"The majority of people are honourable, but figures suggest that in up to 20% of cases financial abuse occurs."

General manager of the HSE National Safeguarding Office Tim Hanly said: "Many cases are subtle, and even unintended, as people may not be aware they actually constitute abuse."

A dedicated support number has been established by the HSE on 06) 461 358 which the public can call for advice and access to appropriate services.

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**48%**

of concerns passed on relate to alleged physical abuse

**24%**

of complaints were about possible psychological abuse

**11%**

of suspected adult abuse cases were sexual in nature



TERRORISED Abuse victim

# Abuse of adults toll

ALMOST 8,000 cases of alleged abuse or neglect of adults were reported to the HSE in 2016 – the first time such figures have been recorded.

Of the 7,884 concerns reported, the most common type among 18-64 year olds was physical abuse at 48 per cent.

Among OAPs psychological abuse was highest at 27 per cent, followed by physical abuse at 22 per cent and financial abuse at 21 per cent.

National Safeguarding Committee chairperson Patricia Rickard Clarke said of financial abuse: “We need a tracking system that accounts for the finances of people with reduced capacity.”

# Report reveals high number of relatives ripping off elderly

Abuse most common in community... not in institutions

By Niamh Griffin

HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

RELATIVES spending elderly people's pensions or threatening to keep them away from grandchildren are some of the shocking abuses uncovered in a new survey for the National Safeguarding Committee.

Figures revealed that one in six people say they know of an elderly person who has been deprived of their own money.

The survey comes ahead of a HSE report on the abuse of vulnerable people, which is due to be launched this week.

This is expected to show a high number of cases where money has been taken from elderly people, according to Patricia Rickard-Clarke, chair of the National Safeguarding Committee.

She said she expected 'a large increase in numbers as more people become aware of reporting,' and she adds: 'I expect financial abuse in relation to older people to be way up there.'

The survey carried out for her committee also found that one in two people know of a vulnerable adult who has experienced at least one type of abuse. It found that

## THOSE SUSPECTING ABUSE UNLIKELY TO REPORT IT – POLL

● Respondents to a Red C poll for the National Safeguarding Committee were asked which of the following forms of abuse have you or someone close to you experienced?

Emotional abuse **32%**  
Abuse by service provider **20%**

Abuse caused by ageism **18%**  
Abuse because of being disabled **16%**  
Financial abuse **16%**  
Physical abuse **16%**  
Sexual abuse **10%**

● One in two people have experienced or know a vulnerable

person who has experienced at least one form of abuse.

● Two in five people think Irish society is bad at protecting vulnerable adults.

● The definition of financial abuse is unclear according to 81% of respondents

● People suspecting abuse

are unlikely to report it – 65% think this.

● Definitions of psychological abuse are unclear according to 85% of respondents

● One third or 34% of respondents would not know who to contact to report suspected abuse

Source: National Safeguarding Committee RED C poll

elderly people, especially those living alone or living with dementia, can be vulnerable to abuse including financial, emotional or psychological, physical or sexual

### Threats to deprive them of seeing grandchildren

abuse. Abuse was also reported by adults living with a disability.

Ms Rickard-Clarke said: 'The highest levels of abuse people talked about were in the community, in the home. We know there is

abuse in nursing homes and hospitals but it is most common in the community, that's the facts.'

One in three people surveyed had experienced or knew someone being emotionally abused.

Ms Rickard-Clarke said this is often linked to financial abuse, saying people reported being denied access to their grandchildren unless they paid money to their son or daughter.

She said others reported someone in the family was accessing their pension and doling it out to them.

She said there were concerns that many people did not realise they were being abused.

Ms Rickard-Clarke said there

were other incidents in which people who use wheelchairs were threatened by their families with being abandoned indoors unless they paid over money.

The survey also found 20% – or one in five people – experienced or know someone who has experienced abuse by an organisation.

This includes state bodies but also home care situations in the house.

Ms Rickard-Clarke warned: 'The poll found a high incidence of people not knowing where to go for help. They might know where to call about physical abuse, but be unsure how to report a doctor or solicitor for taking advantage.'

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