

Definitions and Categories of Abuse

The following table provides definitions, examples and indicators of abuse, (not exhaustive) with which all staff members must be familiar.

➔ Type of Abuse: Physical

Definition The use of physical force, the threat of physical force or mistreatment of one person by another which may or may not result in actual physical harm or injury.

Examples Physical abuse includes hitting, slapping, pushing, shaking, burning, scalding, pulling hair, kicking, exposure to heat or cold, force-feeding, misuse of medication, inappropriate restraint or sanctions.

Physical abuse includes all forms of physical force contact which results in harm to another person including excessive force in the delivery of personal care, forced feeding, rough handling, unwarranted physical pressure (gripping, squeezing) shaking, misuse of incontinence wear, hitting with a weapon or implement, misuse of medication, failing to give medication, poisoning, restricting activities or forcing activities.

Includes inappropriate deprivation of liberty (e.g. being locked in/forced confinement in an area), denied treatment or experiencing threat of physical violence.

Indicators Unexplained signs of physical injury – bruises, cuts, scratches, burns, sprains, fractures, dislocations, hair loss, missing teeth. Unexplained/long absences at regular placement. Service user appears frightened, avoids a person, demonstrates new atypical behaviour; asks not to be hurt.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Sexual

Definition Any behaviour (physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling; coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted towards another person.

Examples Abusive acts of a sexual nature include but are not limited to rape and sexual assault, indecent exposure, intentional touching, fondling, molesting, sexual harassment or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented, or could not consent, or to which he or she was compelled to consent.

Sexual violence and abuse can take many forms and may include non-contact sexual activities, such as indecent exposure, stalking, grooming. It may involve physical contact, including but not limited to non-consensual penetrative sexual activities or non-penetrative sexual activities, such as intentional touching (known as groping), exposure of the sexual organs and any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of another without their consent. Examples of behaviours include inappropriate touch anywhere, masturbation of either or both persons, penetration or attempted penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth, with or by a penis, fingers or other objects. Exposure to pornography or other sexually explicit and inappropriate material enforced witnessing of sexual acts, sexual media harassment. Inappropriate and sexually explicit conversations, remarks, threats, intimidation, inappropriate looking/ touching, sexual teasing/innuendo, grooming, taking sexual photographs/video footage, making someone watch sexual acts/ pornography, making someone participate in sexual acts. Includes digital/ social media and online sexual abuse/ production of sexual images.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is considered a form of both physical and sexual abuse.

Indicators Trauma to the genitals, breast, rectum, mouth, injuries to face, neck, abdomen, thighs, buttocks, STIs and human bite marks.

An adult demonstrates atypical behaviour patterns such as sleep disturbance, incontinence, aggression, changes in eating patterns, inappropriate or unusual sexual behaviour and anxiety attacks.

Indicators of sexual exploitation would include poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance. Other indicators include excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships. Fear of receiving help with personal care and reluctance to be alone with a particular person could also be indicators.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Emotional/Psychological (including Bullying and Harassment)

Definition Behaviour that is psychologically harmful to another person and which inflicts anxiety or mental distress by threat, humiliation or other verbal/non-verbal conduct.

Examples Emotional or psychological abuse includes failing to value the individual, abuse of power in which the perpetrator places their opinion/view/judgement as superior to the individual, harsh value judgements, conveying to the individual that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate, or a nuisance.

Abusive acts of a psychological nature include, but are not limited to threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks, patronising approaches to care and support for example 'elder speak' or spoken to like a child, intolerance of religious beliefs, intolerance of cultural beliefs, and in the case of married/cohabiting couples denying the right to shared and appropriate accommodation.

Failure to show interest in or provide opportunities for a person's emotional development or need for social interaction.

Outpacing – where information /choices are provided too fast for the adult to understand, putting them in a position to do things or make choices more rapidly than they can tolerate.

Denying the individual the opportunity to express their views in a manner which is comfortable to them, deliberately silencing them or ignoring them or their communications written or spoken, making a subjective comment about the way an individual chooses to express themselves, imposing unrealistic expectations on the individual.

Behaviours include deprivation of liberty, persistent criticism, sarcasm, humiliation, hostility, intimidation or blaming, shouting, cursing or invading someone's personal space. Unresponsiveness, not responding to calls for assistance or deliberately responding slowly to a call for assistance.

Includes risk of abuse via technology.

Indicators Mood swings, incontinence, obvious deterioration in health, sleeplessness, feelings of helplessness/hopelessness, extreme low self-esteem, tearfulness, self-abuse or self-destructive behaviour.

Challenging or extreme behaviours; anxious, aggressive, passive or withdrawn.

The carer-person in need of care relationship may be vulnerable to abuse in both directions, neither deliberate but can be very harmful. Co-dependent relationships need to be considered as a new phenomenon with adults at risk of abuse and a potential risk from relatives with mental health or addiction issues.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Financial or material abuse

Definition The unauthorised and improper use of funds, property or any resources including pensions, or others statutory entitlements or benefits.

Financial abuse involves an act or acts where a person is deprived of control of their finances or personal possessions or exploited financially by another person or persons.

Examples This may include theft, coercion, fraud, undue pressure in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits. It may also involve the misuse of power of attorney, and not contributing to household costs where this was previously agreed.

Misusing or stealing the person's property, possessions or benefits, mismanagement of bank accounts, cheating the service user, manipulating the service user for financial gain or putting pressure on the service user in relation to wills property, inheritance and financial transactions.

Examples include theft, fraud, exploitation, the misuse of property, possessions, bank accounts, grants, cash or benefits; internet scamming, phone scamming, putting someone under pressure in relation to their financial arrangements or property, including wills; denial of access to money or property, not contributing to household costs, use of bank and credit cards without permission, running up debts, forged signatures, deliberately overcharging for services activities/required treatments/therapies.

Indicators No control over personal funds or bank accounts, misappropriation of money, valuables or property, no records or incomplete records of spending, discrepancies in the service user's internal money book, forced changes to wills, not paying bills, refusal to spend money, insufficient monies to meet normal budget expenses, etc.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Organisational

Definition

The mistreatment of people brought about by the poor or inadequate care or support or systemic poor practices that affect the whole care setting

This can occur in any organisation or service, within and outside Health and Social Care provision. Organisational abuse may occur within a culture that denies, restricts or curtails privacy, dignity, choice and independence. It involves the collective failure of a service provider or an organisation to provide safe and appropriate services and includes a failure to ensure that the necessary preventative and/or protective measures are in place.

Organisational abuse can be brought about by poor or inadequate care or support services, or systematic poor practice that affects the whole care setting. It can occur when an individual's wishes and needs are sacrificed for the smooth running of a group, service or organisation.

Examples

It can be a one-off incident or repeated incidents; it can be neglect or poor standards of professional practice, which might be because of culture, structure, policies, processes or practices within the organisation. Systematic and repeated failures culturally inherent within the organisation or service may be considered as organisational abuse.

It can result in a failure to afford people the opportunity to engage socially and be involved in hobbies/activities that are meaningful to them, which in turn results in a failure for their psycho-social needs to be met.

It can occur when service users are treated collectively rather than as individuals. Service user's right to privacy and choice not respected. Staff talking about the service users personal or intimate details in a manner that does not respect a person's right to privacy.

Indicators

Inflexible regimes and rigid routines which violate the dignity and human rights of the adults and place them at risk of harm.

Lack of, or poor-quality staff supervision and management. High staff turnover. Lack of training of staff and volunteers. Poor staff morale. Poor record keeping. Poor communication with other service providers. Lack of personal possessions and clothing, being spoken to inappropriately, etc. Weak governance of staff and breaches of professional codes of practices can be indicatives of institutional abuse. The absence of visitors, family and friends discouraged from visiting, lack of flexibility and choice for service users.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Neglect

Definition The withholding of or failure to provide appropriate and adequate care and support which is required by another person. It may be through a lack of knowledge or awareness, or through a failure to take reasonable action given the information and facts available to them at the time.

Examples 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 the necessities of life such as medication, social activities, leisure/ educational opportunities or adequate nutrition and heating. Neglect includes ignoring need, either physical or medical, knowing that a need exists, but choosing to not address that need, thereby leaving the person at risk of deterioration in health and wellbeing.

Neglect includes withdrawing or not giving help that an adult needs causing them to suffer for example malnourishment, untreated medical conditions, unclean physical appearance, improper administration of medication or other drugs, being left alone for long periods when the person requires supervision or assistance. Neglect also includes not meeting the social, psychological or spiritual needs and not addressing required environmental factors/adaptations to adequately meet the needs of the adult.

Indicators Poor personal hygiene, dirty and dishevelled in appearance e.g. unkempt hair and nails. Poor state of clothing. Non-attendance at routine health appointments for example dental, optical, chiropody, social isolation. Whilst there is a positive duty to provide care when in receipt of state carer's allowance there is no legal obligation on carers to continue in the caring role. Assessment of indicators needs to be mindful of identifying carer stress where the carer cannot cope or manage with the responsibilities.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Discriminatory

Definition Unequal treatment, harassment or abuse of a person based on age, disability, race, ethnic group, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, family status or membership of the travelling community.

Examples Being treated differently by individuals, family, organisations or society because of any of the above. Assumptions about a person's abilities or inabilities. Not speaking directly to the person but addressing an accompanying person.

Indicators Isolation from family or social networks.
Indicators of psychological abuse may also be present.

Type of Abuse: Human trafficking/Modern Slavery

Definition Human trafficking/modern slavery involves the acquisition and movement of people by improper means, such as force, threat or deception, for the purposes of exploiting them. It can take many forms, such as domestic servitude, forced criminality, forced labour, sexual exploitation and organ harvesting.

Examples Victims of human trafficking/ modern slavery can come from all walks of life; they can be male or female, children or adults, and they may come from migrant or indigenous communities. Any concerns that an adult at risk may be a victim of human trafficking/modern slavery must be reported to An Garda Síochána.

Indicators People who have been trafficked may believe that they must work against their will. Victims may be unable to leave their work environment and show signs that their movements are being controlled. Victims may show fear or anxiety. They may be subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family members. They may suffer injuries that appear to be the result of an assault.

⊕ Type of Abuse: Online or Digital Abuse

Definition An abusive or exploitative interaction occurring online or in a social media context.

Examples Includes risk of abuse via technology including exposure and uploading of inappropriate abusive material without consent. Includes digital/social media and online sexual abuse/ production of sexual images, online financial abuse, theft of personal information and persuasion towards self-harm.

Indicators Becoming withdrawn, suddenly behaves differently, anxious, clingy, depressed, aggressive, problems sleeping, eating disorders. The exploitation on an online or digital platform can have a serious impact on the victim. This impact can result in the victim soiling their clothes, taking unnecessary risks, missing education/ training, changing eating habits, developing obsessive behaviours, having nightmares, increasing drug/alcohol usage.
