Age-in-Action
THE SA COUNCIL FOR THE AGED
Connecting the Generations®

Elder Abuse

TYPES OF ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Acts that cause injury or physical discomfort - slapping, pushing, hitting, restraining, bruising, burning, and cutting.
- Signs of physical abuse are, amongst others, bruises, burns, swelling and unexplained injuries.

EMOTIONAL / PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

- Acts that inflict emotional mental suffering – being ignored, insulted, blamed, humiliated, isolated, blackmailed, sworn at, treated as a child, called names, shouting, intimidation.
- Signs are nervousness, agitation, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear and withdrawal, depression.

FINANCIAL / MATERIAL ABUSE

- The misuse of funds and assets or obtaining property or funds without full consent, knowledge or under duress.
- Illegal exploitation of funds, property, assets, pension or other monies as well as theft, fraud and damages, are examples of financial abuse.

SOCIAL / PHYSICAL ISOLATION

- Locking an older person away in a room or abandonment.

PASSIVE NEGLECT

- The failure to fulfil care needs. It is the withholding or not providing the care and basic necessities required for physical and mental well-being. This includes withholding of food, warmth, clothing, essential medication and deliberate abandonment.
- Signs of passive neglect are untreated medical conditions, malnutrition, dehydration, dirty living conditions, unkept physical appearance.

SELF ABUSE / NEGLECT

- The failure to care for him / herself, abuse of alcohol, drugs, and improper diet.

SEXUAL ABUSE

- Sexual behaviour towards a person without their full knowledge and / or consent – sexual harassment or assault.
- Signs of sexual abuse are bruising, bleeding, pain or injury in the abdominal, anal and genital areas, recurrent bouts of cystitis or venereal disease and/or symptoms of emotional abuse.

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- The withholding of information or dominating decision making.
- It is the denial of fundamental rights – respect for dignity, personal privacy, freedom of thought, belief, opinion, speech, expression and movement.
- Older persons have the right to freedom, security, accurate information and not be subjected to cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment.

NATURE OF ABUSE

It is clear that the potential victim demands a great deal of care and attention and is highly dependent on his / her caregiver.

Profile of Victim

- Average age is between 70 – 80 years.
- Gender : 7 females : 1 male.
- The victim is most probably depressed, confused or demented and / or demanding.
- The care needs of the older person plays an important role with regard to abuse, especially where constant supervision, assistance with daily living requirements and 24 hour care is needed.
- Social factors contributing towards abuse are limited financial resources, social interaction, living space, care equipment, community resources as well a history of violence.
- The physical state of the older person is also a factor – might be chronically ill, immobile and incontinent.

Profile of Abuser

- 85% of abusers are family members or a person known to the victim.
- Feelings of loss of control, depression, confusion, low self-esteem, resentment, helpless-ness and guilt, as well as a lack of acknowledgement /support, are all psycho-social factors.
- Social factors can be described as constant negative and aggressive communication, accompanied by punishment through hurtful criticism or withdrawal, poor inter-personal relationships, isolation, financial stress, inadequate housing, lack of appropriate caring skills, lack of supervision, lack of knowledge of needs and resources and absence of care facilities.