

Abuse of the Older Person

See it | Prevent it | Stop it

Abuse involving the Older Person is a single or repeated act, lack of appropriate action, denial of human, civil and constitutional rights of a person who is old.





Abuse of the Older Person could include

- Physical abuse
- Psychological/Emotional/Verbal abuse
- Financial/Material abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Rights abuse
- Intentional/Unintentional neglect
- Discrimination & Ageism

It is important to know about abuse. Abuse of an Older Person is a grave and a serious problem.

Recognising and admitting to abuse will put a stop to it.

The Older Person may often not report abuse because of fear of the consequences and a sense of shame and humiliation.

The home environment should be a source of safety and comfort



Victims are most likely to be

- Aged 60 or over
- Vulnerable
- Illiterate/semi-illiterate
- Dependent on others for basic needs
- Unable to communicate effectively
- Persons with dementia, and/or other mental or physical impairments

But all situations are different. Many other victims are financially stable and in good physical and mental health.

The abuser could be a family member or a caregiver or an acquaintance.

The abuser may be suffering from

Stress: a caring situation may lead the family member or the carer or the acquaintance to become stressed which may potentially lead to the abuse of the Older Person.

Addiction related problems: substance abuse or gambling could precipitate abuse of the Older Person.

Dependency: both the victim and the abuser may be dependent on each other for basic needs. The victim may rely on the abuser for daily basic needs while the abuser may depend on the victim for financial help and/or other types of help.



An Older Person can be abused in a number of ways

- **Physical abuse:** the infliction of pain or injury, physical coercion, or substance abuse.
- **Psychological/Emotional/Verbal abuse:** the infliction of mental anguish.
- **Sexual abuse:** non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.
- **Financial/Material abuse:** the illegal or improper exploitation or use of funds or resources of the Older Person.

- **Rights abuse:** denial of the civil and constitutional rights of a person who is old.
- **Intentional/Unintentional neglect:** the refusal or failure to fulfil a care giving obligation. This may or may not involve a conscious and intentional attempt to inflict a physical or emotional distress.
- **Discrimination and Ageism:** this consists of any attitude, or action or institutional structure which subordinates an Older Person or a group of Older Persons through their age, illness, dependency, physical appearance, cognitive decline, mental illness, isolation, poverty or depression.

Abuse of an Older Person happens due to various reasons

- **Bitterness:** caring for an Older Person can lead to exhaustion especially if the carers have to take care of their own families and have work commitments.
- **Life crisis:** caring for an Older Person can cause severe stress especially if carers are dealing with other demands of living.
- **Lack of love and friendship:** when relationships are weak, abuse is more likely to occur.
- **Attitudes towards violence:** there is a tendency for persons to perceive violence as a normal way of solving problems.
- **Vengeance:** some abusers try to make the Older Person pay back for any imagined or real maltreatment they may have suffered from them.
- **Older Person living longer:** the longer persons live, the more the tendency for them to become dependent on others for longer periods of time.

- **Lack of service:** without adequate services in the community one may not be able to care for the Older Person appropriately.
- **Social problems:** poor standards of living, including poor housing conditions, overcrowding and unemployment, may be triggers for abuse of the Older Person.
- **Financial problems:** by taking advantage of the Older Person's assets, carers may lose income because they may have to give up their job in order to care for the Older Person. At the same time, the carer may become financially dependent on the Older Person who may sometimes be reluctant to compensate for such financial help.



But whatever the reason,
abuse should **never**
be tolerated



Unfortunately abuse continues to happen

- **Denial:** either the Older Person does not admit to the fact that he/she is being abused or the abuser does not admit that his/her attitude/behaviour is abusive.
- **Physical/Mental Illness:** the Older Person who has a physical and/or mental illness or communication difficulties will not have the ability and/or courage to report or stop abuse.
- **Fear and shame:** fear and shame of both abuser and victim may stop them from seeking help.
- **Lack of involvement:** outsiders prefer not to interfere because they believe that family problems should remain within the family.
- **Lack of appropriate community services and support**
- **Dependence:** the Older Person has no one to ask for help so he/she has to find an alternative way to change the abusive situation.

- **Lack of awareness:** professional services dealing with abuse may be unknown to the Older Person and he/she may not know whom to turn to. Abusers may not know that, with appropriate help, they could learn how to improve the situation and therefore avoid abuse. Additionally lack of awareness of the abuse on the Older Person by various professionals may allow for more abuse.
- **Isolation:** the Older Person may isolate himself/herself from other persons with the intent of not facing up to the abuse.



Remember

Society in general has an **obligation** to report any suspicion of abuse to the Police or Social Service Agencies.

Abuse of the Older Person can be stopped

- **Education:** in order to fight negative behaviour/attitudes towards older/vulnerable persons whilst at the same time promoting the rights and dignity of the Older Person.
- **Prevention programs:** to enable society to identify and assist victims through improvement programs and seminars/conferences, etc.
- **Research:** is an important means to better identify the true extent of the problem.

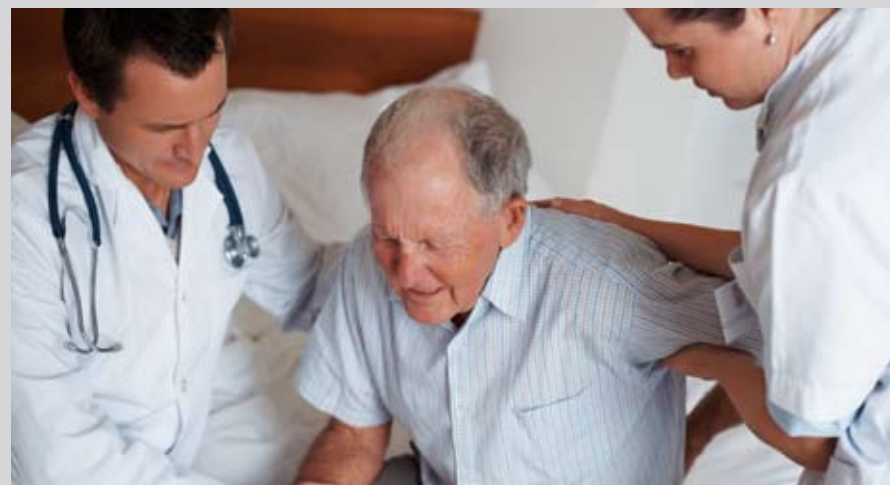


Resources for the Older Person, caregiver and acquaintance

The Abuse Awareness Program will eventually lead to the necessary changes in legislation to protect the Older Person.

Greater public awareness and involvement are required for the success of the Abuse Prevention Program.

- Community Services
- Meals on Wheels
- Day Centres
- Home Help Service
- Handyman Service
- Incontinence Service
- Telecare/Carelink
- Transportation
- Community Nursing Care Services
- Residential Homes
- Social Work Services



For more information contact:
Support Line Tel: 179
Centru Servizz Anzjan
Tel: 2557 5000

Abuse on an Older Person is not excusable

For a family member, caregiver and acquaintance to cope with stress and avoid burnout

- Seek help/support from others.
- Vent out problems by talking with friends etc...
- Join a support group for carers, i.e. sharing experiences with others.
- Take time off to dedicate to oneself; have fun doing something you enjoy.
- Consider using government or private services including private carers, nurses, respite care and residential homes.
- Attend care giving training.





I asked for help
before my problem
got out of control

Abuse of the Older Person is a serious problem.

The Maltese Criminal Code states that abuse of an Older Person is considered as a grievous crime.

- Learn about abuse of the Older Person.
- Seek support for victims and abusers.
- Support efforts/resources to STOP abuse of the Older Person.

What are you
waiting for?
**Break the silence,
STOP abuse**



