

## **Appendix 16: Definitions of Abuse – Vulnerable Adults/Adults at Risk – Ireland**

A vulnerable person is an adult who may be restricted in capacity to guard himself/herself against harm or exploitation or to report such harm or exploitation. Restriction of capacity may arise as a result of physical or intellectual impairment. Vulnerability to abuse is influenced by both context and individual circumstance.<sup>1</sup>

The risk of harm occurs in all socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups, regardless of gender, age or sexual orientation. All adults at risk should be supported and empowered to minimise their own exposure to risk and to find their own balance between taking risks and making the most of the strengths in their own life circumstances.

The main forms of abuse are:

### **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse is the use of physical force or the mistreatment of one person by another which may or may not result in actual physical injury. This may include hitting, pushing, rough handling, exposure to heat or cold, force feeding, improper administration of medication, denial of treatment, misuse or illegal use of restraint and deprivation of liberty.

### **Sexual violence and abuse**

Sexual abuse is any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding. Sexual violence and abuse can take many forms and may include non-contact sexual activities, such as indecent exposure, stalking, grooming, being made to look at or be involved in the production of sexually abusive material, or being made to watch sexual activities. 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). Sexual violence can be found across all sections of society, regardless of gender, age, ability, religion, race, ethnicity, personal circumstances, financial background or sexual orientation.

### **Psychological/emotional abuse**

Psychological/emotional abuse is behaviour that is psychologically harmful or inflicts mental distress by threat, humiliation or other verbal/non-verbal conduct. This may include threats, humiliation or ridicule, provoking fear of violence, shouting, yelling and swearing, blaming, controlling, intimidation and coercion.

### **Financial and material abuse**

Financial abuse is actual or attempted theft, fraud or burglary. It is the misappropriation or misuse of money, property, benefits or material goods or other asset transactions which the person did not or could not consent to, or which were invalidated by intimidation, coercion or deception. This may include exploitation, embezzlement, withholding pension or benefits or pressure exerted around wills, property or inheritance.

### **Institutional abuse**

Institutional abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of an adult by a regime or individuals in settings which adults who may be at risk reside in or use. This can occur in any organisation. Institutional abuse may occur when the routines, systems and regimes result in poor standards of care, poor practice and behaviours, inflexible regimes and rigid routines which violate the dignity and human rights of the adults and place them at risk of harm. Institutional 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.

### **Discriminatory abuse**

Discriminatory abuse includes ageism, racism, sexism, abuse based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.

### **Neglect**

Neglect occurs when a person deliberately withholds, or fails to provide, appropriate and adequate care and support which is required by another adult. 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. It may include physical neglect to the extent that health or well-being is impaired, administering too much or too little medication, failure to provide access to appropriate health or social care, withholding the necessities of life, such as adequate nutrition, heating

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<sup>1</sup>Health Service Executive, Social Care Division, Ireland definition

or clothing, or failure to intervene in situations that are dangerous to the person concerned or to others, particularly when the person lacks the capacity to assess risk.

This list of types of harmful conduct is not exhaustive and there are other indicators which should not be ignored. It is also important to note that if a person is being harmed in one way, he/she may very well be experiencing harm in other ways.

## **FURTHER AREAS OF ABUSE**

### **Exploitation**

Exploitation is the deliberate maltreatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over another person; it is to take advantage of another person or their situation, usually, but not always, for personal gain by using them as a commodity. It may manifest itself in many forms including slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence and abuse, or human trafficking.

### **Domestic violence and abuse**

Domestic violence and abuse is threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. Domestic violence and abuse is essentially a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another. It is usually frequent and persistent. It can include violence by a son, daughter, mother, father, husband, wife, life partner or any other person who has a close relationship with the victim. It occurs right across society, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or geography.

### **Human trafficking**

Human trafficking 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. Victims of human trafficking 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.

### **Hate crime**

Hate crime is any incident which constitutes a criminal offence perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice, discrimination or hate towards a person's actual or perceived race, religious belief, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion or gender identity.

Victims of domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence and abuse, human trafficking and hate crime are regarded as adults in need of protection. There are specific strategies and mechanisms in place designed to meet the particular care and protection needs of these adults.