



## **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Is June 15th**

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June 15th is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), a time to educate communities and policy makers around the globe about the exploitation, abuse and neglect of aging individuals. Established by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the [International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse](#), WEAAD is intended to highlight “the cultural, social, economic and demographic processes” contributing to this enormous public health and human rights issue.

### **Elder Abuse Defined**

Elder abuse takes many insidious forms. The perpetrators are often family members or other caregivers, but also include manipulative strangers. The abuse can be physical, ranging from intimidation to injury to nonconsensual sexual activity. It can be emotional, involving verbal attacks or belittling behavior. Or it can involve financial exploitation. It also includes neglect—a failure to ensure safety and emotional well-being.

### **Everyone’s Loss**

The Department of Justice reports that *at least* 10 percent of U.S. adults over 65 experience abuse each year. The real numbers are dramatically higher. WHO claims that, internationally, merely one out of 24 cases is reported. Some victims worry about reprisals from the abuser if they report their situation. Others are embarrassed to admit being duped by a scammer or manipulative caregiver. Given the number of aging Baby Boomers, this problem is likely to get much worse.

The cost to victims is incalculable. Aside from the billions lost annually due to financial exploitation, they endure fear, injury, deteriorating health and loss of self-esteem. But society at large suffers, as well, with increased health care and legal costs often covered by public assistance programs. In addition, when older individuals become isolated, the greater community is robbed of their companionship and contributions.

### **Know the Signs**

Be on the lookout for the symptoms of elder abuse. Here are some:

- Changes in behavior or sleep patterns. Does the person appear fearful, anxious or depressed?
- Evidence of physical injury, such as bruises, burns or untreated bed sores.
- Signs of poor hygiene or nutrition. Missing medical aids such as teeth, walker or medications.
- Increased isolation and poor living conditions.
- Changes in money management or financial documents. Unpaid bills. Abrupt changes to long-standing legal documents may also signal the presence of a financial exploiter.

### **What to Do?**

Much can be done to fight elder abuse, and it begins with education about its devastating effects. We must also fight the ageism that's rampant in our culture, creating a climate in which our older neighbors are too often devalued and ignored.

We need to empower them to participate in community life to the extent they wish. They need accessible, quality health care, improved public transportation and support services such as community centers. Volunteer visitors to homebound seniors and those living in care facilities can also reduce isolation. Caregivers, who are often struggling, need to be connected to local helplines and other supports.

The elderly must be reassured that there is no shame in falling victim to financial abuse. In fact, by reporting the situation and talking to their age peers about the experience, they may prevent or end abusive treatment of others.

Improved training for medical professionals, nursing home staff and members of law enforcement can lead to better identification of abusive situations. Bank managers should be encouraged to train tellers to recognize financial exploitation.

### **Reporting Elder Abuse**

If you suspect abuse of any kind, report it! If the person is in imminent danger, call the police or 911. Otherwise, contact your local Adult Protective Services. If the individual lives in a nursing home, reach out to the appropriate Long-Term Care Ombudsman. For numbers to call, go to [Eldercare Locator](#), maintained by the U.S. Administration on Aging. Elder abuse is widespread and dangerous. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day reminds us that we all need to do our share to respect and protect the older members of our communities.

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