



Older adults with dementia are at greater risk of experiencing abuse

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According to the Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse (2002), elder abuse is defined as an act or omission that causes harm or distress within a relationship of trust (United Nations [n.d.]). It can manifest as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or financial abuse.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) indicates that approximately 1 in 6 people over the age of 60 has experienced some form of abuse, with it being more common among those living in institutions. Furthermore, an increase in these cases is anticipated due to the global growth of the older population.

Research indicates that older adults with dementia are at greater risk of experiencing abuse; in fact, two out of three people with dementia have experienced some form of abuse (Dias & Fraga, 2024). In this context, it is particularly important to consider several key aspects for the prevention of abuse.

- I. According to Duffy et al. (2024), the following are some risk factors for abuse in older adults with dementia
 - Caregiver Burden: The physical, emotional, and financial stress experienced by family caregivers, often without the necessary training or institutional support, is the primary trigger for abuse.
 - Dependency and Vulnerability: The inability of people with dementia to defend themselves or communicate the harm they are experiencing.
 - Aggression Due to Dementia: In advanced stages, the disease itself can trigger aggressive reactions (physical or verbal) that, if not managed properly, can lead to violent responses from those around them.
- II. Warning Signs of Abuse in Older Adults with Dementia (Van Houten et al., 2025; Wei & Balser, 2025)



- Physical: Unexplained bruises, poor hygiene, malnutrition, dehydration, or pressure ulcers.
- Emotional: Sudden mood swings, sudden fear of certain people, withdrawal, or frequent crying.
- Environmental: Lack of medication, an unsanitary environment, or absence of assistive devices (glasses, hearing aids, walkers).
- Financial: Unusual bank withdrawals or unpaid bills despite having the funds.

III. There is always something that can be done to help

In 2011, the United Nations recognized elder abuse as a global social problem and designated June 15 as the “World Elder Abuse Awareness Day” to promote social and political awareness of this issue.

The observance of this day serves as a framework for promoting concrete actions that can and should be taken to prevent elder abuse, especially against older adults with dementia.

- Awareness campaigns for professionals to help healthcare workers recognize elder abuse.
- Training on dementia and support for caregivers and family members help reduce stress and, thereby, the risk of elder abuse, by promoting strategies such as asking for help, taking breaks, and utilizing social and health services.
- The general public can: Be alert to signs of abuse. Learn about ways to get help and report abuse.
- Older adults can: Stay in touch with friends and family. Learn about their rights. Ensure there are no unwanted changes to their financial resources and legal status.

Remember that there is always something that can be done to help. Elder abuse can be prevented, and we can all play a part in stopping it.



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