



****UNDER EMBARGO – 00.01 MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER****

Abuse of older people at ‘unprecedented levels’ as 2.7 million over-65s revealed to be affected, warns charity

New analysis reveals ‘shocking’ scale of the abuse crisis facing over-65s

- 1 in 5 UK residents (22 percent) have personal experience of abuse as an older person or know someone who has been abused - with almost 2.7 million victims thought to be affected across the country
- Attitudes regarding what ‘counts’ as abuse are thought to be fuelling the crisis, with 1 in 5 people in Wales believing that inappropriate sexual acts directed at older people don’t constitute abuse
- Over half (52 percent) of those surveyed in Wales believe that the abuse and neglect of older people increased as a result of the lockdown
- Charity announces raft of new measures designed to protect older people from abuse and to promote safer ageing

UK safer ageing charity, Hourglass, has today [30 November] warned that abuse of older people is at ‘unprecedented levels’ as new data emerges revealing that nearly 2.7m UK citizens over the age of 65 are thought to have been abused.

The *Growing old in the UK 2020* survey - commissioned by the charity - of over 2,500 adults found that 1 in 5 (22 percent) people either had personal experience of abuse as an older person (aged 65+) or knew an older person who had been abused, and 52% of people in Wales felt that the abuse and neglect of older people had increased as a result of lockdown. Previous estimates have put the figure significantly lower, with the [World Health Organisation](#) estimating that – globally – 1 in 6 people aged 60 and older experienced some form of abuse in the last year.

In March, Hourglass warned that isolation and lockdown would act like a “pressure cooker” for the abuse of older people, with attitudes toward what “counts” as abuse fuelling this crisis, and situations where older people are locked down with their abusers or isolated without care only making things worse. Under lockdown conditions, older people lack the safeguards that would have previously existed through day-to-day contact with the outside world.

Among Welsh respondents, the survey revealed that at least 1 in 5 (23 percent) don’t believe that ‘inappropriate sexual acts directed at older people’ count as abuse; likewise a fifth (21 percent) don’t view ‘pushing, hitting, or beating an older person’ as abuse, while a third (31 percent) don’t see ‘taking

precious items from an older relative's home without asking' as abuse. The overall UK figures were even higher than these, at 35 percent, 30 percent, and 32 percent respectively.

Commenting on the findings, Rachael Nicholson, Director of Hourglass Cymru, said:

"These results are genuinely shocking. Although we've known for a long time that we live in a world prejudiced against older people, the results show how widespread the issue is. These figures really shine a light on the true scale of the crisis, especially here in Wales."

She added that the data confirmed what the charity has long suspected - that the abuse of older people has long been drastically under-reported to authorities.

"Our polling shows that while people know that abuse of older people is a problem in Wales today, there's a complete disconnect between awareness of the issue and a true understanding of the role we all play in preventing abuse."

Nicholson said the data reveals a disturbing level of tolerance towards abusive behaviours in our society.

"While I've no doubt that the vast majority of people don't consider themselves to be abusers, the truth is that a troubling proportion of those we surveyed don't actually see some very harmful behaviours as abuse. Without countering these perceptions, people are far more likely to perpetuate the cycle of abuse and are part of the problem"

Hourglass, the only UK-wide charity focussed on addressing the abuse and neglect of older people, announced this week that it is expanding its points of service entry, both in response to this new evidence as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on its Helpline, the charity is creating the UK's first Knowledge Bank for people seeking support or advice from the charity and its partners. This will include an instant messaging service to signpost users to appropriate resources. Furthermore, the charity will begin to refer cases to a Community Response Team, first being rolled out in Scotland, who will be able to take on casework for older people and their families. In Wales, support is available via the helpline in English and Welsh.

Nicholson added:

"The additional points of entry into the charity will be crucial in expanding support and resources for those suffering from abuse in Wales as well as their loved ones. We want people to know what to do if they suspect an older people is being abused, and we want to ensure we are there to offer that lifeline."

Commenting on the survey Dame Vera Baird QC, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales said:

"These latest findings by Hourglass are both concerning and unacceptable. The abuse of older people is a significant problem and one that regrettably slips under the radar all too often. I therefore welcome this spotlight on the issue of elderly abuse and thank Hourglass for their important work in ending the harm, abuse and exploitation of older people in the UK.

“Lockdown has undoubtedly been difficult for many of us, but for some staying at home is more than a temporary hardship – it can be downright dangerous. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the risk of abuse for vulnerable groups, such as older people. These groups are often unable to speak out and now lack the safeguards of day-to-day contact with neighbours, friends and the outside world.”

She added: “It’s important that people know to look out for signs of abuse in older people and know how to signpost support. It also bears repeating: if you, or someone you know, is suffering abuse, isolation rules do not apply. You can and should break lockdown rules to escape injury or harm. Lockdown will not stop you getting help. Charities like Hourglass carry on, helplines are live, and you are not alone.”

Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, Heléna Herklots CBE, added:

“Stopping the abuse of older people is one of my priorities as Commissioner, and throughout the pandemic I have worked closely with Hourglass, and over 30 other key organisations, to identify where improvements are needed to ensure that older people who are experiencing or at risk of abuse can get the help and support they need to keep them safe.

“This research provides crucial evidence for why action is needed in a number of areas, and will support our ongoing work together to drive change and improvements for older people.

“I am particularly concerned at the findings that significant numbers of respondents did not believe that a number of abusive acts constituted abuse when they were committed against an older person, which reflects the unacceptable ageism and prejudice faced by many older people. Action to tackle these attitudes will be essential to ensure that the abuse of older people and its impact are properly recognised and that resources can be targeted more effectively so older people can access services tailored to their needs and do not miss out on potentially life-saving support.

“Alongside this, raising awareness more generally across society about the ways that abuse affects older people, the signs of abuse we need to look out for, and where to get help and support, will help to ensure that we can all play a part in protecting older people, which would make a positive difference to many people’s lives.”

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Notes to editors

About the data

Growing Old in the UK 2020: Understanding the abuse of older people - Survey

In February 2020, Hourglass commissioned research into the general public's knowledge and understanding of the abuse of older people. Overall, 2,494 people took part in the survey, comprising:

- 1,245 respondents in the UK sample (including representative sub-samples of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- 1,043 respondents in the England sample
- 472 respondents in the Scotland sample
- 500 respondents in the Wales sample
- 479 respondents in the Northern Ireland sample

The UK sample is representative of the UK population and each of the samples for the UK's nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) are also representative of those nations.

In June 2020, Hourglass commissioned an update to the existing survey. Overall, 2,505 people took part in the follow-up survey, comprising:

- 1,207 respondents in the UK sample (including representative sub-samples of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- 1,040 respondents in the England sample
- 496 respondents in the Scotland sample
- 484 respondents in the Wales sample
- 485 respondents in the Northern Ireland sample

About Hourglass

Hourglass (the working name for Action on Elder Abuse) is a UK-wide charity with a presence in all four nations. It aims to protect and prevent the abuse of vulnerable older people by raising awareness of the issues, encouraging education and giving information and support to those in need. It has the only national freephone helpline dedicated to this cause, open Monday to Friday between the hours of 9.00am and 5.00pm on 080 8808 8141 for confidential support and information.

www.wearehourglass.org

Hourglass is a registered charity in England and Wales (1140543), and also in Scotland (SC046278)