

PUSHED

Guidelines for a Sensitised Approach to Supporting Older Victims of Domestic Violence

For the Staff of Nursing Homes

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These Guidelines are funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union and/or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for the information contained in this publicity material.

1 Rainbow Vukovar, (2022). [Internet]. <available at <https://duga-vukovar.hr/provedeno-anketno-istrazivanje-na-po-drucju-vukovarsko-srijemske-zupanije/> [5/04/2023]

Introduction

Violence against older people is under-recognised and insufficiently recorded in Croatia, especially considering that one in five Croatian residents is aged 65 years and over. Data on violence against older people are collected sporadically and the current method of their collection and publication does not provide a comprehensive and systematic insight into the issue.

Violence against older people increased significantly during the pandemic, both in nursing homes and in families. According to a survey by the Humanitarian Association Rainbow Vukovar, almost a third of the older respondents experienced some form of violence, and half of them did not report it due to fear of consequences and social exclusion. In order to reduce the number of cases of violence

against older people, it is extremely important to recognise them in time.

These Guidelines, as well as the Handbook for Professionals which they build upon, were created and printed as part of the project “puSHEd - protect, understand, support; help the elderly”. The project seeks to prevent and combat gender-based violence against older women by developing gender-specific responses in providing support to victims and raising the capacity of relevant professionals from the protection and support system. It also aims to raise awareness among the general population and improve the community’s response to gender-based violence against older women. This primarily implies a higher rate of reporting violence, but also its prevention. The project, known by

the acronym “puSHed”, is carried out by the organisation B.a.B.e (Be active. Be emancipated) in partnership with the City of Zagreb, the Common Path Foundation and the Home for Children and Adults Victims of Domestic Violence “Duga – Zagreb”, with the support of the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia, the Victim and Witness Support Service and the European Social Network. The project is funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme of the European Union.

The Guidelines are based on the available literature, experience and relevant data gathered through ten semi-structured interviews with older women victims of domestic violence, as well as through three focus groups held with

professionals working in this field at various levels (institutions, care facilities, public administration, shelters, associations, etc.). The objective was to map the needs and experiences of older victims, as well as the challenges we are facing as professionals trying to provide adequate support. What we offer in these Guidelines is information that can help one develop a more sensitised approach in working with older victims of domestic violence, focusing on the needs of older women victims.

Recognising violence against older people

Pay attention to how an older person in a nursing home communicates with the staff (for example, whether they withdraw into themselves, are in a bad mood, depressed, passive or absent from activities in which they have previously participated and have suspicious physical injuries). While symptoms of physical violence are directly visible, signs of neglect can be discreet and subtle (such as weight loss or non-compliance with therapy instructions).

These behaviours or signs are not necessarily evidence that an older person suffers violence. However, when they occur, especially several at the same time, it is necessary to assess the person’s situation and condition comprehensively.

Keep in mind that a certain percentage of residents you are in contact with are very likely victims of domestic violence, they just have not shared it with you (yet) or have not recognised it themselves.

Communication in case of suspected violence

The conversation should take place in a safe environment, separately from other nursing home residents. Try to establish a relationship of trust and use an empathetic and non-judgmental approach. In conversation with a potential victim, it may also be useful to ask indirect questions (such as “Do you feel safe?”).

Victims often feel shame and discomfort or fear the perpetrators, who are often their carers/guardians/family members.

Precisely because of the fear of isolation, existential uncertainty and potential conflicts, violence against older people often remains unreported. Therefore, it is extremely important to support them in this process. You should respect the older person's decision about accepting or refusing various types of interventions/services, **but also find a balance between their wishes and their immediate safety.**

Raising awareness among older people about types of violence and support options

Older people regularly fail to recognise violence when they witness it or when it is perpetrated against them. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously make them aware of the importance of recognising and responding promptly to any form of violence.

The most common forms of violence are physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic violence and neglect. Apart from recognising all of them, it is important to make older people aware that the most common perpetrators are people from the immediate environment: children, other family members, partners or spouses, etc.

Older people are particularly exposed to economic violence and neglect. Economic violence means any denial or deprivation of financial resources, putting the victim in a position to beg for money, absolute control over one's financial resources by another person, etc. Besides, a special type of economic violence older people might be exposed to is lifelong support agreements, whose significance and consequences older people are often unaware of at the time of their conclusion, especially because the names of these agreements may be confusing. Non-fulfilment of contractual obligations is often accompanied by domestic violence and threats.

Neglect means any actions that deprive older people of the basic living conditions and necessary care (for example, denial of necessities such as food, water, clothing, toiletries, medicines, etc.), which can result in serious consequences for their physical and mental health and general well-being. Signs of neglect may include poor hygiene, sudden loss of appetite or dehydration, ignoring one's own health issues, unsafe living conditions and social isolation.

Advice for expanding the support system for residents of nursing homes



Informing older people about possible alternative care systems, such as free psychological support and legal counselling provided by civil society organisations and other relevant institutions
suggestion: (some) civil society organisations provide a service that includes accompaniment and support by a trusted person when reporting violence and during the court proceedings



Conducting violence-related activities to raise awareness of the issue
suggestion: panels, guest lectures and workshops organised by nursing home staff
contact local civil society organisations



Encouraging residents to engage in social activities, strengthen their existing social networks and create new ones (to the extent that suits them)
suggestion: link in with organisations and facilities that offer diverse (educational and social) services suitable for older people

Contacts

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mobile phone: 098 982 4641 (svaki dan od 0 do 24h)

City of Zagreb Department for Social Welfare, Health, Veterans and Persons with Disabilities

address: Trg Stjepana Radića 1, Zagreb

telephone: 01 610 1271

email: socijalneustanove@zagreb.hr

web: www.zagreb.hr

Home for Children and Adults Victims of Domestic Violence

“Duga - Zagreb”

(secret location)

official address: Ozaljska 93, Zagreb

toll-free helpline of the counselling centre for children and adults victims of domestic violence:
0800 88 98

email: savjetovaliste@duga-zagreb.hr

Duga Home - general information: 01 383 1770

email: info@duga-zagreb.hr

web: www.duga-zagreb.hr

National Call Centre for Victims of Crime

telephone (dostupan 0-24h): 116 006

email: npc@pzs.hr

web: www.pzs.hr

The Common Path Foundation

Središnji ured

address: Miljackina ulica 42a

telephone: 01 778 9890

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