

Safeguarding Ireland
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Tougher laws would encourage the public to ‘call out’ abuse of vulnerable adults

10% have witnessed abuse of a vulnerable adult in the past year

Public seeks dedicated 24-hour helpline for adult abuse

10% of Irish adults have witnessed adult abuse in the past year and 81% have said that tougher laws would encourage them to take greater action to combat abuse – according to new research commissioned by Safeguarding Ireland.

The Red C research found that 12% of those who witnessed abuse of a vulnerable adult in the past year did nothing at all, while 47% discussed it with the person being abused and 40% discussed it with a trusted person.

Just 15% sought professional advice – and 3% reported what they witnessed to an authority such as the HSE or Gardaí.

Launching the research, Safeguarding Ireland said it highlighted the need for greater resourcing of safeguarding vulnerable adults, both in terms of effective legislation and a dedicated 24-hour information and support helpline.

Safeguarding Ireland Chairperson Patricia Rickard Clarke said: “The fact that 10% of Irish adults reported having witnessed abuse shows that official HSE figures (in excess of 10,000 alleged cases reported annually) are just the tip of the iceberg.

“Based on our adult population (over 18s) of approximately 3.8m, this would imply an estimate of potentially 380,000 witnessed cases of adult abuse per annum. The message from this research is clear – we need tougher laws to support people to take action and to call out abuse of vulnerable adults.

“When a vulnerable, or frail elderly person is forced to do something against their will – be it to do with their finances, their care, or their liberty – it is abuse and this is against the law.”

In 2015 new legislation on Assisted Decision Making was enacted, however it has yet to be implemented. There is also an Adult Safeguarding Bill in ongoing development in the Oireachtas since 2017.

Ms Rickard Clarke continued: “The research has told us that stronger laws, which are enforced, is what will drive the public to be more vigilant in tackling adult abuse. We need these pieces of legislation in force with urgency.”

The Red C research was based on a representative sample of 1,000 adults and also found that younger people, and that those from higher social groupings, were more likely to report that they had witnessed abuse.

A nationwide public awareness campaign on safeguarding is taking from May 20-31.

Safeguarding Ireland brings together 30 national organisations from public services, legal and financial services, the health and social care professions, regulatory authorities and NGOs all working together to protect vulnerable adults. (Members include the HSE, HIQA, An Garda Síochána, An Post, financial organisations and patient, disability and carer NGOs.)

Ms. Rickard Clarke added that the research also highlighted the demand and need for a dedicated 24-hour Safeguarding Telephone Helpline Service, after 82% said they would find such a service very or quite helpful.

“We have important services and support provided across the country by the HSE Safeguarding and Protection Teams. It is clear that this work would be complemented through resourcing a dedicated safeguarding 24-hour helpline which would be an initial ‘go to’ for people when they have witnessed or suspect abuse.”

The Teams are managed by the HSE’s National Safeguarding Office and their contact details are available on the Safeguarding Ireland website.

Safeguarding Ireland also recommended that to better safeguard their future that all adults should plan ahead and make their future choices known including:

- Appoint an Enduring Power of Attorney, which gives financial and legal decision-making responsibility to a trusted person.
- Talk with a GP or Solicitor about making an Advance Healthcare Directive including future healthcare preferences, or place of care.
- Find out about the *Think Ahead* resource. *Think Ahead* helps members of the public talk about and record their preferences in the event of emergency, serious illness or death (www.thinkahead.ie).
- Find out more about managing finances and identifying fraud at www.fraudsmart.ie

Safeguarding Ireland research in 2018 found that just 6% of Irish adults had legally nominated a family member, or friend to be their Attorney (under Enduring Power of Attorney). Also, just 8% had discussed a preferred place of care with family, friends, or an appointed Attorney for if they developed a serious, or long-term illness.

More information at www.safeguardingireland.org.

Further information

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Safeguarding Ireland: www.safeguardingireland.org

Think Ahead: www.thinkahead.ie

Faudsmart: www.fraudsmart.ie

Safeguarding Ireland

Safeguarding Ireland is a multi-agency and inter-sectoral body with an independent chair. It was established by the HSE in 2015 in recognition of the fact that safeguarding vulnerable people from abuse cannot be addressed by any one agency working in isolation, but rather by the key agencies working collaboratively with a common goal – to ensure that adults who may be vulnerable are safeguarded.