

# Ageways

ISSUE

59

Practical issues in ageing and development

APRIL 2002



## *Violence and abuse*

*Elder abuse -  
a hidden reality*

*Challenging harmful  
beliefs*

*Learning about rights*

*Action to promote  
respect*

*plus*

*Gender in project  
planning*

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Leading global action on ageing

# Comment

## Action against abuse

Welcome to *Ageways* 59, in which we focus on an issue that is beginning to emerge as a serious and widespread problem – violence and abuse of older people.

A key problem is lack of recognition of elder abuse, and a taboo in talking about it. The causes of elder abuse are often complex, linked to wider problems in society and age-discriminatory attitudes and systems.

This issue of *Ageways* suggests practical ways of identifying, preventing and dealing with elder abuse. It emphasises the need for a broad approach that tackles not only the effects of abuse but also its underlying causes, requiring action at all levels of society.

**Celia Till and Fiona Clark**  
Editors

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## Themes of future issues

Issue 60 (June 2002) **HIV/AIDS**  
Issue 61 (October 2002) **Livelihoods**  
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Issue 63 (June 2003) **Disability**

We welcome articles for consideration. They should be received three months before the month of publication.

# Letters

## New format

**Thank you to everyone who has written about *Ageways*' new format. Here are a few responses. We will include a survey form in issue 60 to obtain more feedback.**

Thank you very much for your excellent publication. The contents are useful for us, and the new look is better.

*Sarangadhar Smal, Director, Nysadri, India.*  
Email: saranga@sancharnet.in

We like the new style *Ageways* and have always found *Ageways* a very useful resource for our training and community work.

*Maria Kanger, Executive Director, COMBRA, Uganda.* Email: combra@infocom.co.ug

Congratulations on the new look of *Ageways*, which will definitely contribute to make it a more effective and attractive tool for information exchange.

*Birgitte Ebbesen, UNHCR, rue Van Eyck, 11B, 1050 Brussels, Belgium.*

We are glad about the contents and new presentation of *Ageways*. It gives us useful guidance on extending services to older people.

*R M Premadasa Bodhinayake, President, Uva Farmers Development Foundation, Jangulla, Hali Ela, Sri Lanka.*

## One woman's experience

I would like to tell you the story of one woman's experience from the many workshops we hold with older people as part of the Programme for Continuing Education of Older People.

In the group, people can discuss their fears – of ageing, illness and death. By sharing these fears, they are gradually understood. Participants get to know each other and establish a network among themselves.

A student in the 80-plus group has learnt that chronological age is just

one aspect of ageing, and that education never ends.

She came to the group feeling isolated. Now she says it has changed her life. She began to see herself as an ageing person, with inevitable loss, but also with new things to discover: living alone without feeling lonely, developing her independence, widening her social and emotional links, and planning projects she could achieve.

*Prof. Psic. Graciela Petriz, Programme of Continuing Education for Older People (PEPAM), Faculty of Humanities and Educational Science, calle 47 N° 879, 1900 La Plata, Argentina.*  
Fax: 54 221 423 6672  
Email: petriz@way.com.ar

## Support for disabled children

I have informally rendered services to older people since 1985. I am increasingly convinced that community-based rehabilitation projects for older people and for those with mental handicap are mutually supportive.

We find from home visits to identify mentally handicapped children, that they always live with older people, either grandparents or other relatives. Indeed, we often rely on the oral traditions of older people to identify those with mental handicap.

Last Christmas 2001 we held a party in the village for disabled people. The turn-out was amazing. From the youngest to the oldest, everyone enjoyed themselves.

In our outreach stations we have found 30 previously unknown older disabled people. We now have plans to build a day care centre specifically for older people.

Please could you consider issuing guidelines on how to approach this combination of older people and

people with mental disability. We need to work towards integrating the two vulnerable age groups within one action programme.

*Josephine Bakhita, Director, Amani Centre for Children with Mental Disabilities, PO Box 579, Morogoro, Tanzania.  
Fax: +255 23 2600829  
Email: amani@morogoro.net*

### Radio programme is run by us

I would like to correct some errors in the article in *Ageways* 56 about my radio programme, *Older People's Words*.

Firstly, the programme is run entirely by the production team – currently myself and Maximiliano Mores. It does not belong to FAIAF.

The programme was my own idea. As a social communications graduate, I was interested in using communications to provide a social service. A colleague and I researched older people's communications needs, and we developed the programme as a result.

FAIAF – an Argentinian NGO supporting older people – took part in one of the programmes. Later, we received money to cover some of our expenses from an NGO coordinating body which FAIAF is a member of. We have never received any professional fees or government support.

If anyone needs further information, please can they contact me.

*María Cecilia Lorenzo,  
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Bo Parque Capital, Córdoba CP 5016,  
Argentina. Tel: +54 351 4692079  
Email: envaplast@onenet.com.ar*

**We welcome letters from readers. Please write to: The Editor, Ageways, HelpAge International, PO Box 32832, London N1 9ZN, UK or email: ctill@helpage.org Letters may be edited.**

## News

### Second World Assembly on Ageing

HelpAge International has arranged for more than 50 older people from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean and eastern Europe to take part in the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid in April 2002. A new International Plan of Action on Ageing will be adopted at the assembly.

The move forms part of HelpAge International's *Action on Ageing* campaign, which seeks to ensure that the demands of older people living in poverty are included in the new plan, and that resources will be available to implement it.

At the assembly, HelpAge International will launch a new report, *State of the world's older people 2002*. The report draws on consultations with older people around the world, and identifies three pillars for policy and action on ageing: equal rights for older citizens; a fair share of national and international resources; and inclusion in decision-making and in civil society.

*More information: Andrew Humphreys, Campaign Coordinator, Action on Ageing, HelpAge International, PO Box 32832, London N1 9ZN, UK.  
Email: ahumphreys@helpage.org  
Website: <http://www.helpage.org>*

**The draft Plan of Action is available on the United Nations Programme on Ageing website at:**  
<http://www.un.org/esa.socdev/ageing>

### International Day parade



Mbané Jean Robert/EPV

**Older people in the village of Fomopea, Cameroon, celebrated the International Day for Older People on 1 October with a march and speeches organised by local NGO Ensemble Protégéons les Vieux (EPV).**

## New publications

**How to build a good small NGO** is available on the web. It contains guidelines and exercises, with links to other resources. It includes a section on best practice for projects with older people in Africa, written by Amleset Tewodros, HelpAge International's Africa regional training coordinator.

Available at:  
<http://www.networklearning.org>

**Working with video** provides practical guidelines on using video to empower older people, developed at a workshop organised by HelpAge International's Asia/Pacific Regional Development Centre in October 2000.

*More information: HelpAge International Asia/Pacific Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

**Addressing the nutritional needs of older people in emergency situations in Africa: ideas for action** highlights key issues affecting the nutrition of older people in emergencies and suggests ways in which the rights and needs of older people can be more effectively addressed.

*More information: Dolline Busolo, Regional Nutritionist, HelpAge International Africa Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

# Elder abuse

## a hidden reality

*The extent and nature of violence and abuse of older people is just beginning to emerge. Fiona Clark discusses why it happens and what can be done to prevent it.*



**Pension queue in South Africa – attacks at pension pay points relate to wider issues of poverty and unemployment, and ageism in society.**

**E**lder abuse is a serious problem across the globe, but it is still under-acknowledged and largely under-reported. Cases that do come to light are often dismissed as a domestic issue – in a way that domestic violence and child abuse once were – rather than being related to wider issues of discrimination requiring action at all levels.

Abuse can take different forms, and there are many reasons why it takes place. Studies have identified the following forms of elder abuse, drawing on older people's own definitions:

- **physical violence** – beating, pushing, pinching or any act that causes physical injury
- **psychological or emotional** – insults, jokes, threats or indifference, affecting a person's mental wellbeing

- **neglect and abandonment** – insufficient care or attention to meet the person's nutritional, health, hygiene or emotional needs
- **sexual** – any sexual act against the person's will, from suggestive words or actions to forced sex
- **economic or financial** – robbery, theft, illegally taking assets and property
- **cultural** – being forbidden to speak the person's own language or wear traditional dress
- **structural or institutional** – lack of social security systems and fair pensions to allow a reasonable quality of life, difficulty accessing government services because of mistreatment and harassment by government officers, age discriminatory policies and practices.

Key problems are a lack of recognition of elder abuse (acts of abuse may be regarded as normal behaviour), people's reluctance to talk about it, and the consistent denial that it takes place.

## Experiences of abuse

Based on evidence in the HelpAge International network, older people have most frequently identified physical violence as their primary concern, as well as financial abuse, such as robbery, theft and being persuaded to hand over money or property.

In Africa, older people are increasingly at risk of physical violence related to cultural beliefs and accusations of witchcraft, especially against older women.

In a single month, HelpAge International partners in Mozambique identified 142 acts of abuse committed against older people in the communities in which they work. Of these, two-thirds were committed against older women, and the largest number related to witchcraft accusations.

In a study in townships of the Cape Flats, South Africa, however, older people identified sexual abuse as the most common form of violence, including adult sons forcing their mothers to have sex with them.

Older people in Eastern Europe and Russia have identified increased street crime and robbery as a form of abuse. Research by HelpAge International in Kenya highlights institutional abuse faced by older people in health centres.

Another form of abuse is the insecurity and violence that older people are subjected to in conflict situations and emergencies, and lack of provision for older people in relief programmes.

Hein du Plessis

## Who are the abusers?

The reasons for elder abuse are often complex, relating both to the individual and to the economic, social, cultural and political situation.

Many studies point to carers of older people – whether family members, volunteer carers or professionals – as the main abusers. While this is a serious problem, the circumstances need to be taken into account.

Abusive behaviour by public services, such as at pension pay points, government offices or other service providers, is a reflection of society's negative attitudes to poor and vulnerable people.

Older people themselves can be abusive. They may abuse themselves through self-neglect, or they may abuse members of their families or communities. A report from South Africa states that older people's abusive behaviour is often the result of alcohol abuse, unemployment and post-retirement depression.

It is important to see older people in the context of their family, community and political environment, and to recognise and deal with the causes of abuse as well as its effects.

*The law enforcers do not take us seriously. When I reported physical assault by my son, I was told: 'Old man, go and sort it out with your family.'*

*Older man in Kenya*

## Who is most at risk?

While it is difficult to generalise, certain factors can increase the risk of abusive situations arising. Guidelines from the Department of Health in South Africa state that elder abuse is more likely to occur if the person is physically dependent, mentally impaired, or has insufficient income to be self-reliant.

A study of violence against older women in Chile found that gender, co-residence with an adult carer, mental or physical disability, diminished family role, and fear added to their vulnerability.

Older people with strong social contacts, and those with economic and material assets, are likely to be better able to resist the threat of abuse, or to seek support if it does occur. However, assets and property can also put older people at greater risk of abuse, from younger family members wishing to inherit property.

In many African countries, for example, a widow's property is passed to her eldest son or back to the husband's family, which can put pressure on the widow to move out. In countries such as Argentina and Brazil, the recent economic downturn has resulted in adult children moving back to their parents' houses with their children. Sometimes, the older person is relegated to the smallest room, or forced to move out.

HelpAge International has also received repeated reports of older people in South Africa being attacked and robbed at pension pay points, and of older people in Russia being robbed in their apartments. These types of violence relate not only to older people's difficulty protecting themselves, but also to wider issues

of poverty and unemployment, combined with ageism in society.

Ultimately, however, violence is an outcome of unequal power relations and abuse of power. Violence against older people is an extreme example of their powerlessness.

## Action at all levels

Action to combat elder abuse needs to be taken at all levels.

- More information is needed on the causes and consequences of elder abuse, drawing on data provided by older people themselves.
- Broad-based interventions need to be developed, which involve older people in tackling abuse and its underlying causes.
- A change in attitude is required, to break taboos about elder abuse, and treat the issue as seriously as gender-related abuse, child abuse, and generalised crime.
- Governments need to develop comprehensive strategies to stop abuse of older people, including a supportive legal framework, and public education and training for public sector staff to equip them to detect and act on abuse.
- A change of attitude is required among families, communities and older people's organisations to acknowledge the extent of the problem and deal with it on a practical, day-to-day level.
- Older people need to be informed of their rights and responsibilities and supported in exercising them, with reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, the International Plan of Action on Ageing, and national laws and policies.

*References are available on request.*

**Fiona Clark is policy officer, HelpAge International London.**

# Challenging beliefs about witchcraft

*In northern Tanzania, communities are participating in a wide-ranging programme to improve the security of older women, including challenging beliefs about witchcraft.*

**I**n some parts of the world, notably Africa, older women are accused of being witches. They are driven from their communities and even killed. The problem is particularly acute in Sukumaland in northern Tanzania.

The Sukumaland Older Women's Programme was started two years ago by HelpAge International and local NGO, the Magu Poverty Focus on Older People Rehabilitation Centre (MAPERECE). It aims to reduce witchcraft allegations and improve the security of older people, especially older women.

## Building support

The programme uses a wide range of practical interventions and advocacy to tackle the underlying causes of elder abuse, and strengthen local capacity to support older people. Participants range from older people's groups and local communities to government officials, schools and the media.

The programme began with a gradual process of building support. Meetings involving both men and women were held in 70 villages to identify villagers' needs and elect village committees, through which the programme is implemented.

The programme includes interventions aimed at improving older people's health and wellbeing, focusing on new approaches to vital areas such as nutrition, housing, agriculture and

cooking methods. Red eyes, for example, are seen as a sign of being a witch. An actual cause is a lifetime cooking over an open fire. New designs of fuel-efficient stoves are being tried out, to reduce the risk to women's eyes.

The programme also challenges negative attitudes to older people, which allow accusations of witchcraft to thrive. It includes awareness-raising about ageing and gender issues, and training older people in their legal and human rights.

Cultural groups who perform traditional dances and songs are helping to promote positive messages about older people, by developing new songs that encourage respect for elders. They also perform role-plays depicting how older people are accused of witchcraft and the violence that may result, sometimes to crowds of more than a thousand people.

## Change in attitude

There are signs that attitudes are beginning to shift in favour of older people. Initially, the government denied the existence of witchcraft beliefs. However, in 1999, the International Year of Older Persons, it officially condemned the practice, and government representatives are starting to show support.

For example, at a village meeting between the older people's committee, village leaders and the district forestry officer, older people remarked that village government



Susan Majiba/HelpAge International

***Making baskets to sell is part of a broad programme to improve older women's security.***

representatives were not serious about implementing forestry by-laws. The forestry officer promised to look into the issue.

In one village, the older people's committee has identified vulnerable older people and mobilised the community to provide them with basic care in the form of food, soap and firewood. In several villages, the community has agreed to build houses for vulnerable older people.

Older people themselves are noticing a change in attitude. As one older woman said: 'Before, I had to step off the path to get past a group of young people, but now the young people step aside to let me pass by.'

*The programme is funded by Comic Relief and the UK Department for International Development.*

*More information: HelpAge International Programme (address on page 15).*

# A place to learn about rights

*An older people's centre in Bolivia is proving a popular venue for research, training and advocacy to promote older people's rights.*

Older people in Bolivia are the poorest sector of society, but policy makers fail to take them into account. Their social invisibility and the view that they are seen as unproductive and dependent leads to violation of their rights. Many older people from indigenous groups are illiterate and do not speak Spanish, which makes it harder for them to defend themselves against abuse or claim their rights under the law.

The government has made some important commitments to older people, but without a concerted effort by government and civil society, these achievements will not be implemented. In 1997, it introduced the *bolivida*, a universal pension. This provides only a small payment once a year, but it makes a difference to the poorest older people. However, the majority of older people could not claim it, because they had no documentation.



**Pedro Chambi values the chance to socialise and learn about the law.**

Together, the Archbishop of La Paz, the older people's network, DEFAN, and the government agreed to introduce a provisional documentation system, in which older people who had no birth certificate could produce witnesses to testify to their approximate age. This highlighted older people's vulnerability, and showed what could be done by joining forces.

## Recognising rights

The following year, DEFAN established the Social-Legal Centre in La Paz. At the heart of the project is a recognition of older people's right to benefit from social services, and the need for older people to be involved in development processes and policies that affect them.

The centre is housed in a room on loan from the bishop's office. It is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of social workers and students on placements, a part-time legal advisor, psychologist, and members of DEFAN. Its activities include individual socio-legal advice, strengthening older people's groups and networks, campaigning for programmes for older people, carrying out research, and raising awareness of older people's rights.

In a short time the centre has gained the support of a range of institutions, including local government and the police. In the past year, it has been used by 3,500 older people, mainly from rural areas around La Paz, including older people's groups who have come for training in group organisation and income-generating projects.

Pedro Chambi is a member of the Mama Margarita older people's group. 'In the meetings we talk about issues to do with older people,' he says. 'Lately we have been talking about the law. The young women at the centre help us a lot.'

## Guidelines on abuse

The centre has reviewed the effectiveness of the legal system and health service, from the point of view of older people. This has highlighted a lack of provision for dealing with elder abuse, and the centre has developed a methodology and drafted guidelines.

The centre is developing a training programme for older people on rights and leadership, and coordinating with different organisations such as local government, ministries, schools and colleges, and the police, to raise awareness of older people's rights and promote their involvement at a higher level of decision-making.

Contacts are now being made in four more regions of Bolivia with a view to replicating the centre. In future, it is hoped that the role of the centre will change, as older people take on more leadership roles, and public services assume their responsibilities to this sector of the population.

*The centre is funded by the UK Department for International Development and the European Commission through HelpAge International's Active Ageing programme.*

*With thanks to Sonia Cuentis, Social-Legal Centre (email: danciano@ceibo.entelnet.bo) and Sarah Allen, HelpAge International Latin America Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

# Dealing with abuse

*Everyone working with older people needs to be aware of the possibility of abuse. They need to be able to recognise and deal with abuse, and know how to reduce the risk of abuse.*

## Signs of abuse

Abusers are often those close to an older person. Abuse may be taking place in the older person's home, residential home, day centre or hospital. Abuse can take many forms and show up in different ways.

Physical abuse, which includes hitting and pushing, can result in visible signs, such as cuts and bruises, perhaps broken spectacles, or a change in the person's behaviour. Giving inappropriate medication or using physical restraint to keep a 'difficult' older person quiet is a form of physical abuse.

Sexual abuse means sexual contact of any kind without the person's consent. An older person may be too frail to resist, or feel too ashamed to report what has happened. Signs include bruising in the genital area, discharge or infection, and change in behaviour.

Psychological abuse can take the form of isolating the older person, humiliating them, making fun of them, or treating them like a child, including 'punishing' them. Signs include crying, insomnia, confusion, being either very passive or agitated, trembling, not making eye contact, and looking scared or anxious.

Neglect may show up as malnutrition or dehydration. The person may have chronic health problems, or look uncared for (poor hygiene, uncombed hair, dirty or torn clothes). Older people may neglect themselves for

various reasons – illness (such as dementia or depression), side effects of medication, disability (such as blindness or mobility problems), or, particularly with older men, because they do not know how to carry out domestic tasks. Neglect may also be a result of poverty – because the person cannot afford food or fuel.

Financial or material abuse includes stealing or using the person's money or belongings without their consent, including moving into their home or selling their possessions.

Cultural abuse includes forbidding people to speak their own language or wear traditional clothes, or giving them food that they are not meant to eat for religious reasons.

Structural or institutional abuse is a failure by the state and society to protect older people's human rights. If an older person is too poor to be able to meet their basic needs for shelter, food and health care, they are suffering from structural abuse, because everyone has a right to these. Structural abuse includes being denied the right to education, employment, legal protection, participation in civil society and so on, because of age discrimination.

For all forms of abuse, there are two signs to watch out for and respond to:

- if an older person tells you that they are being mistreated
- if a carer – in the family or an institution – refuses to allow visitors to see an older person alone.

## Taking action

Those who abuse older people may do so for a variety of reasons. It is important to find out about and deal with the underlying causes of abuse. For example, relatives may be stressed because they lack information or training, or are too busy with other responsibilities. The same can apply to health workers or professional carers. A carer may have been abused as a child, and not know how else to behave, or wish to 'get their own back'.

If you suspect that an older person may be at risk of abuse:

**Be vigilant** Keep in touch with the older person. Try to visit them regularly so that you can notice if there are any changes in their behaviour or appearance.

**Speak out** It can be difficult to speak out against abuse. The person you are accusing of abuse may be able to harm you. The older person experiencing abuse may be unwilling to talk about it, because they are too ashamed, or cannot accept that their son or daughter is neglecting them or stealing from them, or they are scared of making things worse. Make sure you know where to go for support.

### **Work with others to oppose abuse**

Abuse of any vulnerable person, young or old, is a violation of their human rights. Learn about human rights and help others to do so (see page 10). Find out what laws or organisations you can use to promote older people's rights. Work with people in your community to set up groups and networks to support older people and raise awareness of their rights.





### **Encourage older people to learn about their rights.**

Often the best counsellors are older people themselves. In Mozambique, Tanzania and Peru, for example, older people are trained as counsellors to support other older people (see page 16).

## **Avoiding abuse**

There are ways in which you can work with older people's groups and others to help reduce the risk of elder abuse.

**Individually** Encourage older people to feel positive about themselves. People who love and respect themselves are better able to stand up for themselves and others. Focus on the older person's positive qualities, involve them in the group, and give them responsibilities so that they feel useful.

**Groups of older people** Get the group to think about the poor treatment that older people receive. Promote the idea that everyone deserves to be well treated. Support those who have been abused.

Encourage the group to carry out awareness-raising campaigns directed at families and the local community.

**Families** Share discussions that have taken place in the older people's group with families, so that they become aware of the messages and treat older people with respect.

**Local community** Organise discussion groups and campaigns. Stick up posters with slogans promoting a culture of respect for older people. Organise activities with younger age groups, such as school students, to raise awareness of older people's rights and contributions. Spread the news about older people's rights.

**Institutions** Develop a 'watchdog' group to ensure that older people are treated well. Get the support of local public and private institutions to set up a local network to protect older people, and offer them help to do so. Get them to commit themselves long-term, and to establish mechanisms and resources to protect older people's rights.

**Government** Assist older people's groups to advocate for policies supporting their need for a dignified life, such as a universal social security system, and to press for laws protecting older people to be implemented.

## **Legal rights**

There are many legal instruments supporting the rights of older people. These include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- United Nations Principles for Older Persons
- Regional declarations – for example, the American Declaration of Human Rights mentions the right to social security, and the duty of children to support and protect their parents when they need it
- National constitutions – for example, the Peru constitution mentions the duty of the community and state to protect older people
- National and international laws.

**Adapted with thanks from *Del Maltrato al Trato Digno (From Abuse to Respect)*, a handbook in Spanish for counsellors produced by Centro Proceso Social, Peru. Centro Proceso Social trains older people as counsellors, supports the development of older people's groups, and encourages institutions to promote older people's rights.**

More information: Luz Barreto Carreño, Programmes Director, Centro Proceso Social, Av. Gerardo Unger 663 – San Martín de Porres, Lima, Peru. Email: [prosoci@telematic.com.pe](mailto:prosoci@telematic.com.pe)

Additional information from American Association of Retired Persons website: <http://www.aarp.org/confacts/health/avoidabuse.html>

# Finding out about abuse

*The following exercises can be used to raise awareness of older people's rights, and to find out if older people are being denied their rights.*



Céline Hall/HelpAge International

**Health check-up with Alzheimer Society Romania. Everyone has a right to medical care.**

## Older people's rights

**Understanding and respecting older people's rights are key to preventing abuse.**

**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by United Nations member states in 1948, states that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights. It sets out the rights and duties that everyone has, regardless of their status.**

For example, everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including medical care and necessary social services; security in old age; and participation in the cultural life of the community.

The following exercise can be used with people who work with older people, such as project staff, volunteers or carers, or with groups of older people, to raise awareness of older people's rights. Note that participants will need to be able to read to do this exercise.

Pass round copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see page 12). Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Why do we have human rights?
- What are they really about?
- Are they a way of living?
- Are they laws?
- Are they about how a government treats its citizens?
- Are they about how one human being treats another?
- What happens when a government does not respect human rights?
- What happens when individuals do not respect the rights of others?

The answers to the last question should allow you to introduce the idea of abuse and lead into a discussion about abuse (see below).

This exercise can also be done using the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (see page 12).

## Identifying abuse

This exercise can be used with people working with older people, or older people themselves, to help them identify instances of elder abuse.

If necessary, remind everyone about human rights.

If there are more than eight people, divide the group into smaller groups. Give each group a short story, in which an older person suffers an experience that amounts to abuse. For example:

*An older woman goes to a clinic for treatment for the pain in her left leg. The nurse says: 'Go away, it's just old age that is causing the pain. What can we do about it?' The woman asks: 'If it's old age, why isn't there a pain in both legs?'*

*The nurse makes fun of the woman in front of everyone: 'Listen to this old bag of bones, she thinks she knows more than the nurses about medical things.' She gives the woman a shove in the back and tells her to get out and make way for younger patients.*

Ask the groups to list ways in which the older person's human rights are being denied. Ask them to explain why these are human rights abuses. Then ask each group to report back to everyone. You can encourage people to add to the different groups' lists.

Some of the responses should include:

**Right to equality** – the woman is treated differently because she is old.

**Right to human dignity** – she is insulted and made fun of in front of others.

**Right to physical security** – the woman is deliberately pushed.

**Right to healthcare** – she is not treated for her complaint.

## Acknowledging elder abuse

People who have suffered abuse are often unwilling to admit it, especially physical abuse.

People may complain of neglect, theft, or being spoken to rudely. However, they often find an excuse, such as: 'My son probably needed the money' or 'The nurse was very busy'.

A younger person may excuse abuse of an older person by saying: 'But he was being very difficult' or 'She was refusing treatment'.

Focus groups (structured discussions in a small group) are a good way to

get people to talk about sensitive issues, such as abuse. They allow people to talk in a way they feel comfortable with, and they encourage participation from people who may feel they have nothing to say.

Focus groups often reveal complex issues that would not be revealed in other ways, such as one-to-one interviews. They can help people acknowledge that abuse is happening in their community or institution.

Do not start by trying to talk about abuse, but structure the discussion in a way that can lead people to talk about abuse, using their own words – they may not necessarily use the word 'abuse'. For example:

**Storyline** – Start telling a story and ask participants to complete it. You can ask for clarification, or introduce new elements in the story. This helps to generate an open discussion about sensitive topics, including violence.

**Timeline** – Ask participants if there are changes in people's attitude and behaviour towards older people. Do things happen now that did not happen in the past? Why?

**Geographical distancing** – Encourage participants to describe events that happen far away, in another country or region. Afterwards, compare these with the local experience.

If participants have mentioned several different kinds of abuse, it can be useful to ask them to rank them in order of importance. They can do this by arranging objects that represent different forms of abuse.

### Practical points for focus groups

- **Facilitators need an understanding of the ethnic, cultural, religious, social and economic background of the participants.**
- **The group should involve no more than ten people. A good discussion can take place with six people.**
- **A session should take two hours at most.**
- **Involvement must be voluntary.**
- **Participants may need refreshments.**
- **You may need to run separate groups for men and women. The facilitator of a women's group should be a woman.**
- **It may be useful to involve the group in recording key issues on a flipchart, if they are comfortable with this.**
- **The facilitator needs to notice participants' body language, as well as what they say.**
- **Participants who have experienced abuse may require support – counselling should be offered to those who need it.**

*Adapted, with thanks, from 'Rights and older people', a training pack prepared by HelpAge International's Africa Regional Centre and from material produced by the Ageing and Life Course, World Health Organization.*

*More information: Amleset Tewodros, Training Manager (address on page 15).*

# Information sources

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Set of principles adopted by United Nations General Assembly in 1948. All UN member countries are bound to apply these principles.

*United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), 8-14 Avenue de la Paix, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.*  
<http://www.unhcr.ch/udhr/index.htm>

## United Nations Principles for Older Persons

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1991, setting out older people's rights to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. Governments were encouraged to incorporate the principles into their national programmes whenever possible.

*United Nations Programme on Ageing, Department of Social Development, United Nations, 2 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Fax: +1 212 963 3016*  
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop/iyoppop.htm>

## Del Maltrato al Trato Digno (From Abuse to Respect)

Training manual for counsellors in Spanish, produced by Centro Proceso Social, Peru.

*Details on page 9.*

## WHO report on elder abuse

Report of a study by the World Health Organization and partners in eight countries – Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Canada, India, Kenya, Lebanon and Sweden – with older people in the community and primary health care workers. The study aims to establish components of elder abuse, as identified by older people themselves and by those forming the primary health care teams, and make recommendations for action. It will feed into the development of a global strategy for the prevention of abuse of older people. Due April 2002.

*More information: Silvia Perel Levin, Ageing and Life Course, NCD Prevention and Health Promotion, World Health Organization, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Email: perellevins@who.ch*

## Leaflets promoting rights

*Access to health care, Access to welfare and support and Giving to family and society* are three leaflets promoting older people's rights to policy makers and the media in South Africa.

*More information: HelpAge International programme, South Africa (address on page 15).*

## People's Movement for Human Rights

Website with a section on 'Human Rights and Aged Persons', summing up international agreements under which older people's rights are protected and should be promoted. It also connects with main development issues around livelihoods, food, poverty, refugees and discrimination, and provides links to African and Asian learning institutions for human rights education.

<http://www.pdhre.org>

## Older people in Africa

Video highlighting problems encountered by older people in Africa, such as HIV/AIDS, shelter and emergencies, with testimonies from older people and views of people specialising in ageing issues. Aimed at generating changes in policy towards older people by governments and others.

*More information: HelpAge International Africa Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

## International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)

Aims to increase society's ability to recognise and respond to the mistreatment of older people. The network's objectives are to increase public awareness of elder abuse; promote education and training of

professionals in identifying, treating and preventing elder abuse; support advocacy on behalf of abused and neglected elders; and stimulate research into the causes, consequences, treatment and prevention of elder abuse and neglect.

*More information: Dr Gery Bennett, Secretary, INPEA. Fax: +44 20 7377 7844 Email: gerry.bennett@THHT.org*

## International Day for Older People

Takes place on 1 October each year.

*More information: UN Programme on Ageing (see above)*

## Human Rights Day

Takes place on 10 December each year.

*More information: UNHCR (see above).*

## Regional rights programme

An Africa-wide programme run by HelpAge International's Africa Regional Development Centre to increase understanding of the nature and extent of violations of the rights of older people, and develop guidelines for interventions aiming to address the issue. The programme is producing a video on older people's rights.

*More information: Pension Munyama, Rights Coordinator, HelpAge International Africa Regional Development Centre (address on page 15).*

## Back issues of Ageways

### Training older people to protect their rights

(Programme in Peru) issue 53

### Learning about legal matters

(Training older people in Tanzania) issue 54

### Fighting for the rights of older people

(Pension payments in South Africa) issue 54

### Elder protection

(How to identify and resolve abuse) issue 49

# Taking gender into account

*Ageing affects men and women in different ways. The following exercises are designed help to understand these differences, and take them into account in planning projects.*

**Men and women have different roles throughout their lives, leading to different experiences and needs in old age. Many of these differences are related to unequal power relationships. Policies and programmes that do not address gender issues – issues relating to the way that society treats people according to whether they are male or female – are bound to promote inequality.**

## Roles and resources

This exercise helps participants appreciate that:

- men and women have different roles in their community
- older men and women have different roles from younger men and women.

If there are a lot of participants, break the group into smaller groups. Provide them with writing materials. Ask each group to think about a community that they are all familiar with – a particular village or urban district – which includes people of different ages.

Explain that you will ask each group to think about what people in the community do, in each of the following age bands:

- 20-45 year olds
- 45-60 year olds
- 60-75 year olds
- over-75 year olds.

If there are several groups, you could ask each group to discuss one age band.

*Ask participants to discuss the following issues:*

- **Roles** – what do people do for themselves, their families, the community?
- **Resources** – who has access to land, crops, animals, tools, cash? Who has control of these?
- **Expectations** – do people in the community have specific ideas about what men and women should do at different ages? Do they have ideas about who can access or control resources?

*Ask the groups to make separate lists of what the men and women in each age band do. Discuss the lists.*

Participants will see that:

- Men and women have different roles.
- Older men and women have different roles from younger men and women.
- Men and women of all ages perform certain activities because society expects them to.

Gender-related issues vary between different societies and cultures.

However, in many societies: Women have a lower status than men, leading to a poorer diet, less access to education, risk of sexual violence and physical abuse, and exclusion from decision-making. Women are often expected to do what their husbands tell them. They may not be comfortable about speaking up in front of their husbands.

Boys and men are excluded from many household activities. They may not learn important life skills, such as



Geoff O'Donoghue/HelpAge International

**Men usually work to earn an income, and may face particular problems when they can no longer do so.**

how to eat a healthy diet and how to take care of themselves.

Men usually go out to work – playing a 'productive' role – while women take care of the home and family – playing a 'reproductive' role. Much of men's work is more public and therefore acknowledged and valued. Much of women's work takes place in the home and is undervalued.

Older men may become depressed when they can no longer work and contribute an income. Older men living alone may not know how to look after themselves.

Women often remain socially integrated for longer. However, older women are more likely to be widowed, live alone, and live in poverty. Property and inheritance laws often discriminate against widows. In older

# Taking gender into account

## continued

age, a woman's son may take the role of head of the house.

Older women's health may be affected by a lifetime of gender-based inequalities and multiple pregnancies.

Both older men and women are viewed negatively. They are discriminated against in different ways. For example, older women may be accused of witchcraft, while older men may be accused of being lazy.

Older men and women contribute to their families and communities by giving advice, take care of children, passing on cultural traditions, and contributing to the household economy.

## The animal game

The following exercise helps participants examine their assumptions about men and women, and power inequalities between the sexes.

*Write the incomplete name of a variety of animals or birds on pieces of paper – for example, lion, giraffe, eagle, parrot, honeybee. Ask everyone to find a partner. Ask each pair to choose an animal or bird that they like and complete its name. Ask pairs to answer the following:*

- Agree one reason why you like this animal.
- If you were given a chance to have another life what would you choose to be, male or female? What would you like to do? Give one reason for your choice.

*Ask pairs to introduce each other to the big group and share their discussions.*

The game helps participants to see how associations about the animal kingdom are reflected in society's views of men and women. For example, in one workshop, one pair liked the lion 'because he is strong and king of the jungle'.

*Encourage participants to explore how their comments about the animals and their choices for another life reveal their attitudes to men and women.*

## Prejudice

This exercise helps participants understand gender-based prejudices against older people.

*Divide participants into small groups. Give each group a set of statements on separate pieces of paper.*

*For example:*

- Older people are always bad-tempered and complaining.
- Older women turn into witches.
- Many older men turn into autocratic self-important rulers.
- Older women are lazy.
- Older men just sit around and wait to be served.
- Older men can't look after themselves or look after a home.
- Older men often find it more difficult to learn new things than older women.

*Ask the groups to put the statements on the floor in front of them, face up. Give each group two envelopes labelled 'True' and 'False'.*

*Ask participants to take turns to pick up and read out the statements. Ask the groups to discuss each statement, decide whether it is true or false, and put it in the appropriate envelope. Point out that discussion is more important than quick decisions.*

*Ask participants to keep in mind the following questions (you may want to write these up):*

- Where does the statement come from? Who says it?
- How does it affect the way we think of older men and women?
- How do we know whether it is true or not?
- What evidence do we have to challenge it?

*Review the activity:*

- Which statements were easy to agree on and which were difficult? Why?
- Where do such statements come from? Who makes them? Why?
- How do they affect the way we think of and treat older people? Give examples.
- How do they affect older women and the way they see themselves?
- How do they affect older men and the way they see themselves?
- How do they affect the way older men and women relate to each other?

*Sum up with a reminder that older people are often excluded from society. Point out that the statements show how girls and women are discriminated against, even when they have grown older, and how men can suffer as a result of a change in their status as they get older.*

**Adapted with thanks from material for a workshop organised by HelpAge International's Africa Regional Development Centre in Nairobi in 2001 and from the centre's 'Training manual on ageing in Africa'.**

*More information: Amleset Tewodros, Regional Training Manager (address on page 15).*

## HelpAge International Members

### Caribbean

Action Ageing Jamaica  
Extended Care Through Hope and Optimism (ECHO), Grenada  
HelpAge Barbados/Barbados National Council on Aging\*  
HelpAge Belize\*  
National Council of and for Older Persons/HelpAge St Lucia  
Old People's Welfare Association (OPWA), Montserrat  
REACH Dominica\*  
Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP), Antigua

### Africa

Associação dos Aposentados de Moçambique (APOSEMO)  
Elim Hlanganani Society for the Care of the Aged, South Africa  
HelpAge Ghana (HAG)\*  
HelpAge Kenya\*  
HelpAge Zimbabwe\*

Mauritius Family Planning Association  
Muthande Society for the Aged (MUSA), South Africa\*  
Regional Centre for Welfare of Ageing Persons in Cameroon (RECEWAPEC)  
Senior Citizens' Council, Mauritius  
Sierra Leone Society for the Welfare of the Aged  
Sudanese Society in Care of Older People (SSCOP)  
Uganda Reach the Aged Association

### Asia / Pacific

Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (BWHC)  
China National Committee on Aging (CNCA)\*  
Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), Philippines\*  
Council on the Ageing (Australia)  
Fiji Council of Social Services  
Foundation for Older People's Development (FOPDEV), Thailand  
HelpAge India\*  
HelpAge Korea\*  
HelpAge Sri Lanka\*  
Helping Hand Hong Kong\*

Instituto de Acção Social de Macau  
Mongolian Association of Elderly People  
NACSCOM, Malaysia\*  
Office of Seniors Interests, Australia  
Pakistan Medico International  
Positive Ageing Foundation, Australia  
Resource Integration Centre (RIC), Bangladesh  
Senior Citizen Association of Thailand\*  
Singapore Action Group of Elders  
Tsao Foundation, Singapore  
USIAMAS, Malaysia\*

### Europe

Caritas Malta HelpAge, Malta  
Centre for Policy on Ageing, UK  
Cordaid, Netherlands  
Counsel and Care, UK  
DaneAge Association, Denmark  
Elderly Woman's Activities Centre, Lithuania  
Eurolink Age, UK  
Help the Aged (UK)\*  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), UK  
Mission Armenia

Slovene Foundation (Slovenska Fondacija), Slovenia  
Zivot 90, Czech Republic

### Latin America

Asociación Gerontológica Costarricense (AGECO), Costa Rica\*  
Caritas Chile  
CooperAcción, Peru  
FAIAF, Argentina  
Fundación Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones del Trabajo (CESTRA), Colombia\*  
Lima Co-ordinating Group (Mesa de Trabajo de ONGs Sobre Ancianidad), Peru\*  
Red de Programas Para al Adulto Mayor, Chile  
Pro Vida Bolivia\*  
Pro Vida Colombia\*  
Pro Vida Ecuador  
Pro Vida Perú

### North America

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)\*  
Help the Aged (Canada)\*

\* Full member

## HelpAge International Regional development centres

*These offices can put you in touch with members in their region.*

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PO Box 14888, Westlands, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya Tel: +254 2 444289 Fax: +254 2 441052 Email: [helpage@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:helpage@africaonline.co.ke)

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### East and Central Europe network

Coordinated from the HelpAge International London office (email: [chall@helpage.org](mailto:chall@helpage.org)) and by: Nijolė Arbačiauskienė, Chairperson, Elderly Woman's Activities Centre, V. Landsbergio-Zemkalnio 6-37, Kaunas LT-3042, Lithuania Tel: +370 7 719757 Fax: +370 7 719757 Email: [arbanijo@takas.lt](mailto:arbanijo@takas.lt)

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## Ageways mailing list request form

To go on the mailing list for *Ageways*, please complete this form using CAPITAL LETTERS and send it to: Publications, HelpAge International, PO Box 32832, London N1 9ZN, UK Fax: +44 20 7843 1840. Alternatively, email your details to: [cdobbing@helpage.org](mailto:cdobbing@helpage.org)  
If anyone else in your organisation would like to receive *Ageways*, please photocopy this form and ask them to complete and return it.

<p>Title _____</p> <p>First name _____</p> <p>Surname _____</p> <p>Job title _____</p> <p>Organisation name _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>Postal code _____</p> <p>Country _____</p> <p>Tel _____</p> <p>Fax _____</p> <p>Email _____</p>	<p><b>How old are you?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Under 30   <input type="checkbox"/> 30-60   <input type="checkbox"/> Over 60</p> <p><b>Do you have access to the web?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><b>What is your job?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Social worker   <input type="checkbox"/> Health worker</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Trainer   <input type="checkbox"/> Administrator</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Student   <input type="checkbox"/> Librarian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Emergency relief worker</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____</p> <p><b>What sort of area do you work in?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Urban   <input type="checkbox"/> Rural</p> <p><b>Does your work focus primarily on older people?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p><b>Do you work for an organisation?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes   <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><b>If yes, which of the following describes your organisation?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Older people's organisation / pensioners' association</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Community-based organisation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Local or national NGO/religious organisation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Government organisation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> International NGO/religious organisation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> International government or multilateral agency (e.g. WHO)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Training/educational institution</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____</p>	<p><b>How many copies of Ageways do you need?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> English</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Spanish (Horizontes)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Russian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ukrainian</p> <p><b>If 10 or more please say how you will use them</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>We will use this information to distribute <i>Ageways</i>. We may also use it to distribute other HelpAge International materials, or pass it to other organisations to distribute their materials.</p> <p>If you do not wish to receive information other than <i>Ageways</i>, please tick this box. <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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# Action to promote *respect*



*Discussing elder abuse in Argentina.*

In **Argentina**, elder abuse has been coming to light, but in the provinces there is no system for preventing or treating it. A team of social workers who work with older people researched elder abuse in Tandil, Buenos Aires province. In November 2001, they led two workshops at a conference on violence in old age, organised by the non-governmental organisation, ZONTA-Río Gallegos in Río Gallegos, Santa Cruz province.

Social workers, government officials, carers, lawyers, police and older people's leaders learnt how to identify cases of abuse and overcome problems tackling abuse. Community members, including older people, worked to develop older people's ability to detect cases of abuse among their peers.

*More information: Lic. Maria Pura Cordonnier Email: Puralibros@arnet.com.ar or Lic. Ivan Olivera, 4 de abril 15, CP 7000 Tandil, Buenos Aires, Argentina*

The failing economy in Eastern Europe has led to a growth in violent crime, especially against older women.

In **Lithuania**, the Elderly Woman's Activities Centre (EWAC) is helping women protect themselves through self-defence classes.

*More information: Nijolė Arbačiauskienė Chair, Elderly Woman's Activities Centre (address on page 15).*



*Learning self-defence in Lithuania.*

Thousands of pension payments were suspended in the northern province of **South Africa** in 1998. Local NGO, Elim-Hlanganani Society for the Care of the Aged, teamed up with a local law centre to support pensioners' fight for their rights. In a court ruling, the judge ordered pension payments to be resumed.

*More information: Florence Khosa, Elim-Hlanganani Society for the Care of the Aged, Box 72, Elim Hospital, 0960, Elim, Northern Province. South Africa Email: elimcare@mweb.co.za*

Peer counselling is helping older people in Chokwe, southern **Mozambique**, to rebuild their lives after severe flooding destroyed their homes. Older people have been trained to listen to other older people's problems and provide advice. 'I would have not spoken about this problem of witchcraft accusation except to a fellow older person who understands this phenomenon', said one older woman.

*More information: Nec Chipfupa, Programme Manager, HelpAge International, Mozambique (address on page 15).*

Older people in Karagwe, north-west **Tanzania**, are being trained to advise other older people about laws relating to inheritance, land tenure and marriage.

*More information: HelpAge International, Tanzania (address on page 15).*

**HelpAge International is a global network of not-for-profit organisations with a mission to work with and for disadvantaged older people worldwide to achieve a lasting improvement in the quality of their lives.**

**Ageways exchanges practical information on ageing and agecare issues, particularly good practice developed in the HelpAge International network. It is published three times a year by HelpAge International, with funding from Help the Aged (UK).**

Copies are available in English, Spanish (**Horizontes**), Russian and Ukrainian, free of charge on request to project staff, carers and older people's organisations. Please complete and return the form on page 15.

**Ageways** is also available on the web at: <http://www.helpage.org>

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Front cover photo: Rani Biwa's home was ruined by a cyclone in Orissa, India. In emergencies, older people's needs are often neglected - an example of structural abuse. Rob Penn/HelpAge International