

Irish public believes abuse of vulnerable adults is widespread

New law and public information campaign planned to tackle problem

11 April 2017: Half of all Irish adults say they have experienced the abuse of vulnerable adults either through being abused themselves or seeing somebody close to them abused, according to the results of new research being published today.

The research, commissioned from Red C by the National Safeguarding Committee, shows widespread public concern that many vulnerable adults are open to and are experiencing physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.

Among the research findings are:

- Physical abuse of vulnerable adults has been witnessed/suspected by 1 in 3 adults, very often in the home.
- Over 1 in 3 has experienced emotional abuse.
- Almost 2 in 5 (38%) think vulnerable adults are badly treated. One in three believes vulnerable adult abuse to be widespread.
- There is significant public concern about the need to safeguard those who are limited in their ability to protect themselves.
- There is a lack of clarity over where to report vulnerable adult maltreatment, particularly among the young

Adults who may be vulnerable are those who may be restricted in their capacity to guard themselves against harm or exploitation, possibly as a result of illness, dementia, mental health problems, physical disability or intellectual disability.

According to the NSC Chair Patricia Rickard Clarke: "The members of this Committee have come together with one objective in mind: To ensure that adults who may be vulnerable are safeguarded and that there is a zero tolerance of abuse. These research findings indicate a very worrying prevalence of vulnerable adult abuse, uncertainty over what constitutes psychological and financial abuse, and a lack of knowledge of what to do when you become aware of the abuse of vulnerable adults.

"These survey results will provide a baseline against which progress in developing public awareness and changing attitudes and behaviour can be measured. We are now planning a public awareness campaign on the issue of abuse of vulnerable adults, and we would urge the Government to introduce legislation which would provide for independent advocacy on behalf of vulnerable adults and a National Safeguarding Authority with a dedicated budget."

The Minister of State at the Departments of Social Protection, Justice & Equality and Health Mr Finian McGrath said: “The research commissioned by the National Safeguarding Committee suggests a startling prevalence of abuse of vulnerable adults, as well as a lack of clarity of how and where to report such abuse when it is witnessed. Society and Government have a duty of care towards all of its citizens, particularly those who are more vulnerable. Measures to tackle this issue are not the preserve of any one Government Department. This is a cross-departmental issue and I intend to work across departments to agree measures to protect our vulnerable adults from abuse.”

Any vulnerable adult can be subject to abuse, Ms Rickard Clarke said. Recent cases of historical practices and institutional abuse in Ireland have led to significant public concern about safeguarding our most vulnerable citizens.

She said: “In addition to strengthening the legislative framework for safeguarding, the National Safeguarding Committee wants to see progress towards the establishment of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission. This will provide support to adults whose capacity for making decisions is in question. It must be given adequate resources.

“This Service is provided for in the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which we would like to see fully commenced as soon as possible. This legislation aims to prevent exploitation of this vulnerable group of adults and to ensure that their will and preferences are respected in areas such as health, personal welfare, property and financial matters.”

For further information please contact:

Murray Consultants	01 4980300
Mark Brennock	087 2335923

Note to Editor

1. The National Safeguarding Committee (NSC) is a multi-agency and inter-sectoral body with an independent chair. It was established by the HSE (but independent of it) in December 2014 in recognition of the fact that safeguarding vulnerable people from abuse is a matter that cannot be addressed by any one agency working in isolation, but rather by a number of agencies and individuals working collaboratively with a common goal. The NSC brings together key players in public services, legal and financial services, the health and social care professions, regulatory authorities and NGOs representing older people, people with

disabilities and carers. All have come together with one objective in mind – to ensure that adults who may be vulnerable are safeguarded.

The NSC will lead on encouraging an organisational and societal culture which promotes the rights of adults who may be vulnerable and it insists on zero tolerance for abuse. It will provide strategic guidance to the Government, the HSE, and other national stakeholders. Since establishment the NSC has developed a Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021 which was launched on December 20th 2016.

2. The nationwide public opinion survey on abuse of vulnerable persons was commissioned by the National Safeguarding Committee in October 2016 and undertaken in December 2016. It was undertaken to provide a baseline against which progress in developing public awareness and changing attitudes and behaviour can be measured.
3. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed by the President on 30 December 2015. The Act reforms Ireland’s capacity legislation which has been in place since the 19th century. It establishes a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults who have difficulty in making decisions without help. The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides for the establishment of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission to support decision-making by and for adults with capacity difficulties and to regulate individuals who are interacting with people who have capacity difficulties. At present, a limited number of provisions of the Act have been commenced, including provisions to allow for the recruitment of the Director of the Decision Support Service. Following detailed scoping and when the operational processes required for the Decision Support Service are in place, the Mental Health Commission will be enabled to liaise with the relevant Government Departments in relation to the provisions of the Act that will need to be commenced to make the Decision Support Service operational. Currently, it is anticipated further commencement will occur during the course of 2017.
4. The members of the Committee are:

Pat McLoughlin	CEO Alzheimers Society of Ireland
Ms Susan Kent	Department of Health
Ms Miriam Finnegan	Department of Social Protection
Det Sgt Jennifer Molony and Inspector John Lynch	An Garda Siochana
Mr Brian O’Donnell	CEO National Federation of Voluntary Bodies
Mr Mark Blake Knox	Not-For-Profit Organisation
Ms Joan O’Connor	Policy and Research Officer Disability Federation of Ireland
Mr Phelim Quinn	CEO Health Information and Quality Authority
Mr Eamon Timmins	CEO Age Action
Ms Louise O’Mahony	Banking and Payment Federation Ireland
Ms Mary Keane	Deputy Director General The Law Society
Ms Maureen Kavanagh	CEO Active Retirement Ireland
Ms Catherine Cox	Head of Communications Family Carers Ireland
Ms Siobhan Nunn	HSE Principal Social Worker from Safeguarding and Protection Team
Mr Paddy Connolly	CEO Inclusion Ireland

Dr David Robinson
Mr Michael Fitzgerald
Mr Pat Carey
Mr Mervyn Taylor
Mr Brendan O'Shea
Ms Patricia Gilheaney
Ms Ann Marie O'Connor
Mr Tom Fitzpatrick
Ms Phil Ni Sheaghda
Dr Cathal Morgan
Mr Tim Hanly
Ms Marguerite Clancy
Dr Verena Keane
Dr Maria Moran
Patricia Rickard-Clarke

Consultant Representation RCPI
HSE Social Care Management
COSC
Manager SAGE
Irish College of General Practitioners
CEO, Mental Health Commission
Business Manager, MABS
Chartered Accountants of Ireland
ICTU
HSE Social Care Division
Manager HSE National Safeguarding Officer
HSE Senior Research and Information Officer
Faculty of Learning Disability, College of Psychiatrists
Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry, College of Psychiatrists
Independent Chair