

New Forms of Criminal Acts Against (and Abuse of) Older Persons

A Rapidly Growing Threat to
Vulnerable Persons Using Ordinary
and Advanced Communication Tools

**United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention
and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)
Side Event 2024**

Organised by the NGO Committee on Ageing Vienna

IMPRESSUM

Short publication on the side event in the framework of the 33rd annual session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), 13-17 May 2024, organised by the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna. September, 2024, NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna

PUBLISHER

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The Committee on Ageing at the United Nations Vienna

was constituted in 1981 as a Substantive Committee at the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO). The members of the Committee are international Non-Governmental Organisations (iNGOs) interested in multifaceted issues related to ageing and older persons. The Committee collaborates with similar NGO CoAs in the UN in New York and Geneva.

The topic selected for today's side event is only one of the many relevant topics addressed by the Committee. Other topics discussed by the Committee in monthly meetings at the UN in the '*Decade of Healthy Ageing*' (2020-2030) include Human Rights issues, intergenerational perspectives, the impact of digitalization, lifelong learning, as well as cultural aspects of ageing.

A special topical conference is organised to celebrate the UN's International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) on October 1st every year.

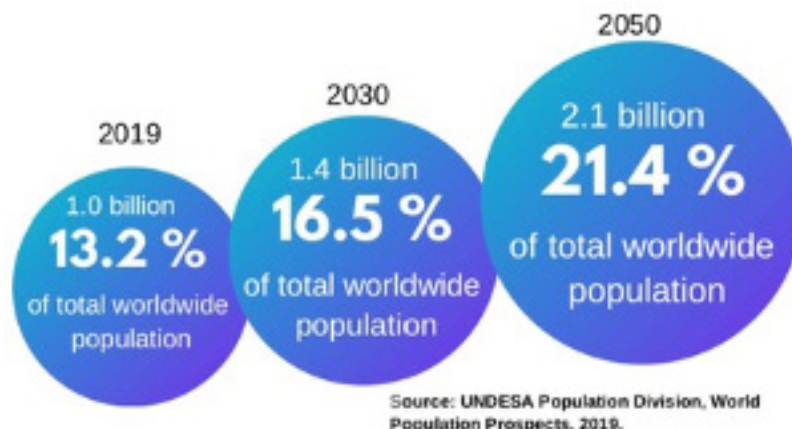
If you are interested in further information concerning our Committee, please consult our website:

www.ngoageingvie.org

United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) Side Event - organised by the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna

NEW FORMS OF CRIMINAL ACTS AGAINST (AND ABUSE OF) OLDER PERSONS – A RAPIDLY GROWING THREAT TO VULNERABLE PERSONS USING ORDINARY AND ADVANCED COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Worldwide growing number of older persons >60



This event aims at raising awareness of criminal acts against older persons through modern technologies. The proportion of older persons (>60) around the world is growing. From a criminal perspective, crimes against older persons are considered low risk crimes. Older persons are particularly vulnerable to fraud by telephone approaches as well as through friendship or romance to escape loneliness.

How can older persons be made aware of the dangers? How can they protect themselves from criminal acts? Older persons need to be recognized as a particularly endangered group.

PROGRAMME

OPENING REMARKS

- ◆ **Dirk Jarré:** Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna, President of the European Federation of Older Persons (EURAG)

SPEAKERS

- ◆ **Heinz Kurt Becker:** Former member of the EU Parliament, Vice President of the European Seniors' Union (ESU)
- ◆ **Edith Simöl:** Psychologist and Technology Expert, Head of the Austrian Service Centre Digital Seniors at the Austrian Institute for Applied Telecommunications (OIAT)
- ◆ **Josef Hörl:** Associate Professor (emer.) of Sociology and Social Gerontology at Vienna University, Chair of the Austrian section of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)
- ◆ **Thomas Frühwald:** Specialist of Geriatrics and Gerontology, member of the Austrian Bioethics Committee, Board member of the Austrian Society for Geriatrics and Gerontology, Board member of the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna

CLOSING by **Rita Assogna**, Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna

Introduction



DIRK JARRÉ, CHAIR OF
THE NGO COMMITTEE ON
AGEING, UN VIENNA

On May 14, 2024, the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna, held a side event in the framework of the annual session of the Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) at the United Nations in Vienna. This event was entitled

“New forms of criminal acts against (and abuse of) older persons - a rapidly growing threat to vulnerable persons using ordinary and advanced communication tools”.

The event was very well attended and supported by numerous international non-governmental organisations, as well as by the research institutes and organisations the speakers belong to. The conference was particularly appreciated by members of the UN Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice as it highlighted in this context the potential dangers to which older persons are exposed through frauds or scams, using modern communication media.

As our society is rapidly moving from an analog to a digital environment, this process offers appreciable new opportunities but also some high risks for older persons. The opportunities are various: the maintenance of friendship relations and the exchange with family members who live elsewhere are considerably facilitated. Access to a great variety of information and the choice and ordering of goods and services at distance are made easy.

At the same time, the elderly – as well as young – are exposed to high risks of victimization and unlawful exploitation by criminals. Especially older persons are contacted by telephone or via WhatsApp and e-mail by fraudsters who often use the “grandchild trick” or the “daughter-son trick” to extort considerable amounts of money. Another

reason why older persons are particularly vulnerable to telephone fraud and friendship/romance offers is that for many of them the telephone and the use of the internet are attractive ways out of loneliness. Fraudsters exercise psychological pressure by pretending, e. g., that a grandchild is in danger and urgently needs money to get back home or be treated in hospital. In addition to financial fraud via telephone, e-mail or different online platforms, the risk of financial exploitation of older persons also exists in family care settings. This phenomenon can arise in the frequently precarious situation of dependent older persons in care, where they are particularly vulnerable and prone to violence and fraud.

Four well-known experts presented different views on the topic:

Heinz Kurt Becker, former member of the European Parliament, spoke about European Union regulations addressing risks of modern means of communication.

Edith Simöl, from “Digital Seniors”, explained how older persons can understand the dangers and protect themselves from becoming victims of cyber fraud.

Josef Hörl, professor of sociology, presented findings about older persons being victims of financial abuse within the family, also using sophisticated technological tools.

Thomas Frühwald, geriatrician and gerontologist, provided insight into the multidimensional vulnerabilities of older persons and how exposed they can be to violence and abuse.

Dirk Jarré

Bad Ischl, September 2024

How Can Political Institutions Protect Older Persons from Criminal Activities?

HEINZ KURT BECKER

First of all, let me express my gratitude to the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna, for holding this side event and the opportunity to make a contribution to the topic of the digital abuse of the elder generation.

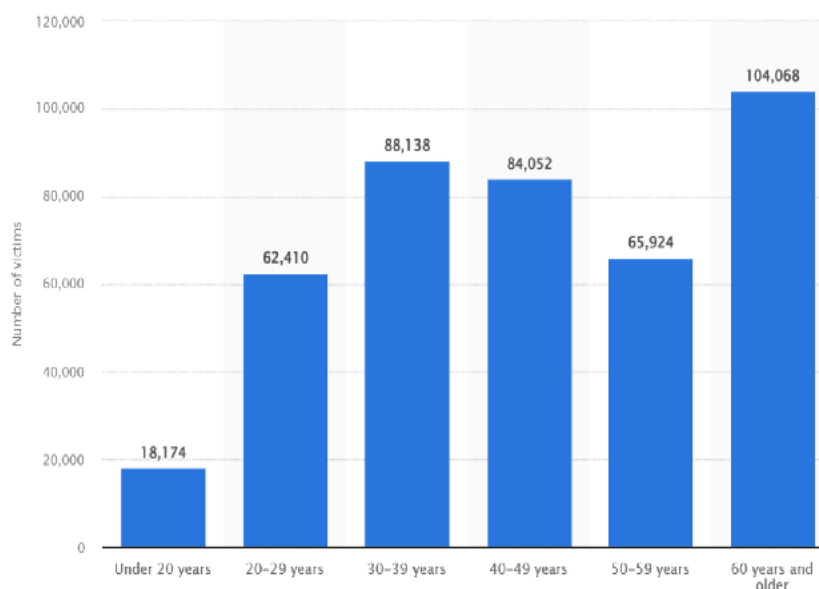
Having experience as former Member of the European Parliament and Vice President of the European Seniors' Union, I understand that besides the priorities on social, health and care matters, the challenges caused by the rapidly developing digital technologies are the most relevant for seniors nowadays and in the future.

Digital revolution brought a lot of benefits for seniors such as internet, smart phones and other means of connection to the world. But it hides also some risks such as criminal actions against unaware seniors. To provide tools for protection, we might organize trainings for users of elder generations to ensure safe living with and in the digital world. This leads us directly to the topic

of elders' abuse and cybercrime, such as fraud as the most frequent type of crimes against the elderly.

The vulnerability of many elderly people has made them a target for criminals

Number of cyber crime victims in the United States in 2023, by age group¹



in the worldwide web. There are some statistics illustrating the grade of digital abuse as a form of cybercrime against elder generation. Statistics taken from the United States, year 2023 is considered to be the most representative as it comes from the country, which is one of the most digitally developed.

The data show the following:

Cybercrime victims in the 60 plus pop-

¹ Source: Statista, U.S cyber crime victims 2023, by age, published by Ani Petrosyan, Apr 3, 2024, URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1390164/us-victims-cyber-crime-by-age/>

ulation are nearly double than in the 20 to 29 years age group.

Cybercrime against the elderly is on the rise worldwide. The main reason is that more and more seniors are getting active online, especially since the pandemic, and the trend is increasing even further.

Prime reasons why older adults are often more vulnerable to financial exploitation and online fraud are their limited knowledge about the functioning of the internet, insufficient digital literacy and a lack of familiarity with online threats and also a (kind of) trusting nature.

Loneliness and isolation some seniors live in, very often makes them seek social connections online, making them more vulnerable to scammers, pretending to offer friendship or emotional support. It happens because seniors may not always be able to read correctly the intent behind messages. They get exposed to the risk of falling victim to social engineering attacks, which can result in financial loss or misuse of personal information. In addition, older persons are more vulnerable to identity theft because they are often more trusting and can therefore be easily exploited financially by fraudsters. Older persons often have built up savings through a lifetime of work and/or investment and may therefore do not consequently monitor their credit and financial accounts.

Understanding the urgency of the problems and challenges, legal regulations, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA) of the European Union has addressed

these irritating and damaging phenomena. The Digital Services Act focused on user security, the protection of fundamental rights, the prevention of illegal or harmful online activities as well as the spread of disinformation. While preserving a fair, safe and freely available Internet environment. Such legal provisions is what our elderly population is expecting. The *Digital Services Act* of the EU is somehow a logical follow up of two other legal regulations of the EU:

The EU's General Data Protection Regulation, in force since 2018, (according to which, for example, the Facebook parent company Meta had to pay a fine of 1.2 billion euros in Ireland - the reason for this is an incorrect procedure when passing on data from Europe to the USA) and the Copyright Directive, in force since 2019, (here, 6 states have already been sued for non-implementation and - corporations like YouTube as a whole have accepted and implemented the upload filters, according to which music, images, written works or video recordings can no longer be used without asking or without payment).

Now, the new Digital Services Act (DSA) is the next step of the EU in regulating the digital world. The organisations and companies regulated by the DSA include all globally leading online platforms such as marketplaces (largest is Amazon), social networks (most popular are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.), content sharing platforms (no.1 is YouTube), app stores (dominant are Apple, Samsung, etc.) as well as travel and

accommodation portals (like Booking.com). The risk of illegal content is widely spread on popular online platforms and search engines.

Therefore, the DSA makes platforms reaching more than 10% of Europe's consumers a subject to specific rules which are important because of the specific risks. Large-scale internet services may carry harmful elements with illegal content and destructive impact to fundamental rights, public safety and welfare affecting European individuals and the society as a whole.

For example, these large size companies are obliged:

- ◆ to establish a contact point for authorities and users;
- ◆ to report crimes on their platforms;
- ◆ to offer user-friendly terms and conditions;
- ◆ to guarantee transparency regarding advertising, recommendation systems or content moderation decisions.

They must proactively identify, analyse and assess systemic risks associated with their services in cases of:

- ◆ illegal content;
- ◆ fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, media freedom and media pluralism, discrimination, consumer protection and children's rights;
- ◆ public security and electoral processes;
- ◆ gender-based violence, public health,

child protection and mental and physical well-being.

The big players on the internet:

- ◆ are subjected to an inspection once a year;
- ◆ must send their user data to the European Union, forwarded to the Commission and the national authorities for control;
- ◆ and must provide verified "Artificial Intelligence (AI) experts" with access to their platform data to enable the detection and identification of systemic risks to EU citizens.

Since February 2024, the new rules apply to all platforms - to the so-called very large online platforms and online search engines, which I mentioned before, already since the end of August 2023.

And the penalties are very painful: Fines of up to 1% of global annual turnover can be imposed by the EU - for Google with around 200 billion euros turnover, a fine of 2 billion euros – that would hurt anyone.

The *Digital Service Act* (DSA) also regulates what most people are interested in – these are the artificial texts, photos, videos, etc. which can be easily created by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and provide people with false content, distort the truth, enable financial fraud and even influence elections.

At the top of the *Digital Service Act* is the regulation that Artificial Intelligence (AI) MUST always be clearly marked. Users must be able to immediately recognize when a certain content

was generated by using AI. Synthetic audio, video, text and image content must be labelled and recognized as artificially created or manipulated - subject to high penalties for non-compliance.

Considering the effects of the rapid digital revolution, the elder generations and all of us are faced we must put the next resulting question:

How can we help elder citizens be more protected?

The fact that 75% of internet users in the EU have bought something online at least once. Therefore, it is a must to look for best possible protection for elder people.

Above all, it is important to strengthen the digital skills of senior citizens as broadly and deeply as possible and make everyone use the new technologies in a responsible and safe manner - through education and training, from childhood on and of course in their professional life up to the old ages. Lifetime learning must be the rule.

This requires major initiatives by governments at national and regional level, as well as by local authorities and the social partners, which must live up to their respective responsibilities.

Measures can be financial assistance programs supporting civil society associations and private initiatives in the organisation of courses for elder citizens to acquire digital knowledge and competence. This could be accompanied by my favourite model, even if it sounds a bit

trivial: Communities and/or civil society organisations may establish intergenerational groups, where young volunteers educate elders in acting in the digital world and learning about the dangers and risks of online communications. The young people should be thoroughly prepared for this task, which may need only a few hours' workshop. To summarize: Despite all the problems we are dealing with today, I want to end with a positive statement: Whatever challenges will come, let's not be afraid, we will master – because if we act now,

“The future can be better than its present reputation!”

How Can Older People Recognize and Protect Themselves Against Fraud?

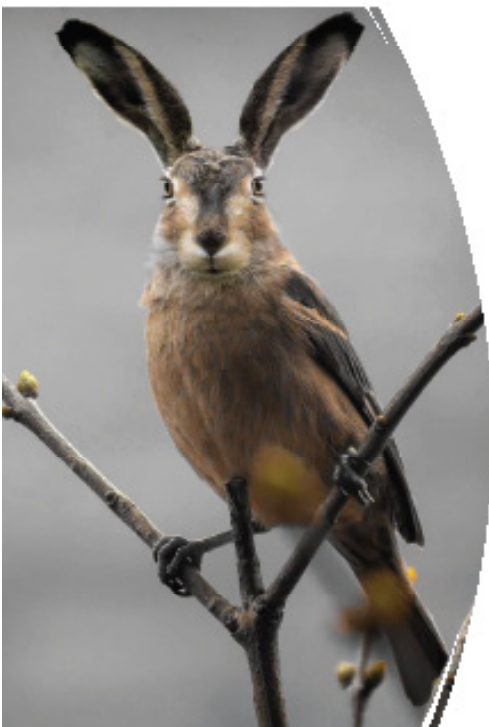
EDITH SIMÖL



How can older people recognize and protect themselves against fraud?



20240514 - CCPCJ Side Event, Vienna – Mag.^a Edith Simöl



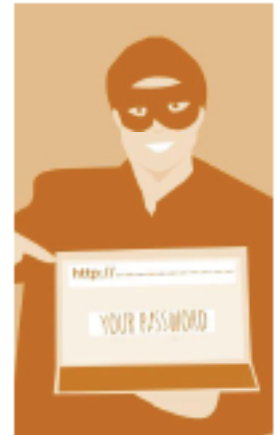
What is this?

A Rabird!

Fraud on the Internet

When it comes to fraud on the internet, we often find that we can't tell what's real and what's fake.

Fraudsters use a variety of means of communication every day to get your money. These means include telephone, WhatsApp, E-mail and dating platforms.



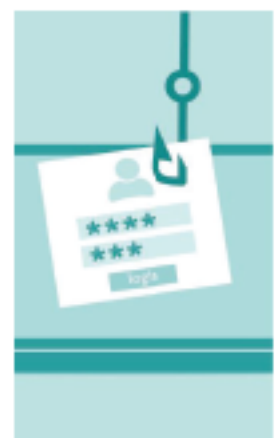
Quelle: pixabay.com

3



Fraud on the Internet

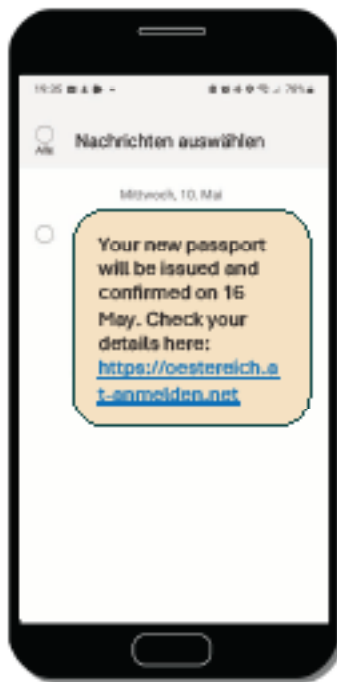
- Fake phone calls from supposed family members in distress or companies that need access to your computer to protect you from cyber attacks
- E-Mails from banking institutions and authorities where your urgent action is required to avoid financial loss
- Friend requests and hot vows of love via WhatsApp or social media platforms



Quelle: pixabay.com

4



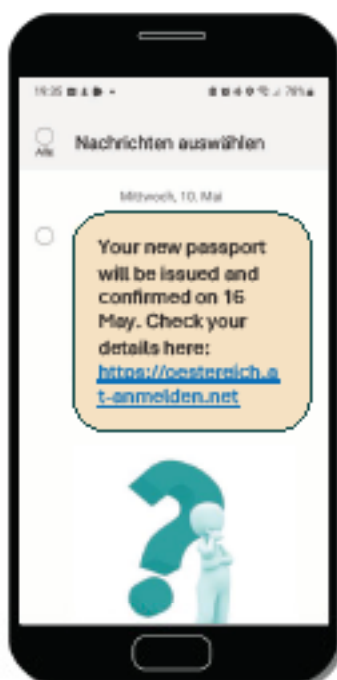


To avoid your account being blocked, please carry out the security update under the link: <https://bawag.872.9988-login.com> - Your BAWAG team

POST AG: Your parcel AT 419553 is subject to a customs fee (€1.99), which you must pay at: postag-delivery.com

Hi mum, my mobile phone is broken. This is my new mobile phone number you can save it. Can you send me a WhatsApp message on this number?

3



Did you recently apply for a passport?

Are you a customer of the bank mentioned?

Have you ordered something?

Does your child really have a new mobile phone?

6



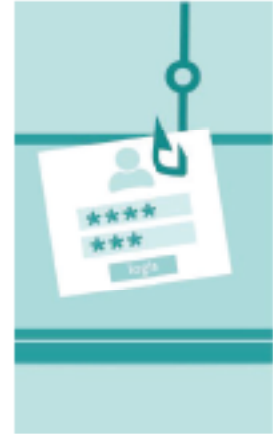
Phishing

All examples can be summarised under phishing scams.

Criminals pretend to be a well-known company (or family member).

Messages with a link (e.g. emails, text messages, chat messages) are sent in the name of this company.

Using credible-sounding arguments, they try to obtain sensitive data (e.g. passwords, credit cards) and ultimately your money.



Quelle: pixabay.com

7



Phishing

Criminals use phishing to steal valuable access data.

Online banking data is popular.

Phishing traps are disguised as emails text or chat messages.



Quelle: pixabay.com

8





Hi smiling face, I'm really impressed with your profile and personality. I also admire your good sense of humour. I don't usually post in the comments and I'm so sorry - I tried to send you a friend request, but it didn't work. Can you please send me a friend request? Thank you so much.



2 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Nachricht

Love Scam



—

Why do people fall victim to such scams?



Scammers use our emotions to manipulate us.



We are afraid for our family members, we are afraid of losing money, we want to be loved.



In short, because we have feelings, we make it easy for scammers.

How can we recognize and protect ourselves against fraud?





Remember the picture from the beginning.
The Rabird?



Knowledge helps!



I need to know that there are fraud traps and
how to recognize them.



Watchlist Internet

Internet fraud, traps & fakes at a glance

Find out about current cases of fraud.
Watchlist Internet provides information
about current phishing attempts on its website.



Fraudsters are inventive.
New scams are reported every day!

<https://www.watchlist-internet.at/>



Tips for recognizing phishing messages

- Check the sender's address.
 - Question the content of the message.
 - Contact the company directly and ask if they sent you a message.
 - Identify and check the web address. Are there any errors in the web address?
 - Agree on "code words" with family members.
- **The most important rule:** Reputable companies such as banks, online shops or classified ad platforms never ask for customer data by e-mail. It is best to delete such messages immediately!



Quelle: pixabay.com

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How can older people recognize and protect themselves against fraud?



Like all other people, regardless of age.

Are older people particularly more vulnerable to the mentioned forms of fraud?

Whether I fall into a fraud trap does not depend on age, but rather on the knowledge of fraud.

However, digital knowledge is often lacking at an advanced age.

Nevertheless, we should not make the mistake of believing that only older people fall victim to internet fraud.



„There is no one who cannot be cheated.“

A Scammer

Stay alert!



digitaleSeniorInnen
Servicestelle für Bildungseinrichtungen

Thank you for your attention.

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Das ÖIAT ist Mitglied der ACR - Austrian Cooperative Research (www.acr.at).



Financial Elder Abuse and Exploitation in Community Settings

JOSEF HÖRL

It should be made very clear that financial elder abuse in community settings (committed mostly by family members; less frequently by friends or neighbors) is very different from criminal fraud, scams, and identity theft. The main difference is that strangers must first cultivate an illusion of trust and they seek out potential targets, whereas family exploiters take advantage of a pre-existing relationship. Fraud perpetrators must cultivate an illusion of trust and legitimacy or create some kind of fake emergency to convince their targets to comply. Fraud perpetrators actively seek out potential targets, whereas, financial exploiters have already earned trust. Unlike fraud, financial exploitation does not require that the perpetrator have an intention to deceive the elder, although exploiters sometimes make false promises. The methods of family perpetrators can include the following:

- ◆ simply taking the elder's money, property, or valuables;
- ◆ borrowing money (sometimes repeatedly) and not paying it back;
- ◆ cashing pensions without permission;
- ◆ misusing ATM or credit cards, or us-

ing them without permission;

- ◆ forcing the elder to part with resources or to sign over property.

The WHO defines elder abuse as follows:

“Elder Abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person. It can be of various forms: physical; psychological/emotional; sexual; financial or simply reflect intentional or unintentional neglect.”

This definition can be found in the 2002 Toronto Declaration on the global prevention of elderly abuse. Link: http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/alc_toronto_declaration_en.pdf Consequently, this definition of elder abuse of the WHO contains all the elements just mentioned above. Unintentional abuse may occur for e.g. when a distressed or over-burdened caregiver applies wrong medication.

While fraud is clearly a case of a criminal act and therefore studied by researchers interested in criminology, most forms of elder abuse are studied by researchers more interested in sociology,

social gerontology, or social welfare interventions.

A further conceptual problem is the extent to which it is useful to consider financial elder abuse as comparable with or different from other forms of elder abuse. Many cases of physical and/or emotional abuse occur in caregiving settings where a distressed caregiver mistreats the older person. Financial abuse is different in kind, for it has characteristics that are rare in other forms of elder abuse. Perpetrators are often motivated simply by greed, rather than distress.

Financial abuse can be perpetrated remotely, some forms require access to only the assets, not the person. Abusers who were dependent on the older person are usually adult children dependent on elderly parents for housing and financial assistance. In other forms of

may continue to invest in their children.

This meta-analysis (Yon et al. 2017) is showing the world-wide prevalence estimated for the five recognized subtypes of abuse. Physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and financial abuse appeared most frequently, while sexual abuse and neglect were less often studied.

World-wide financial abuse pooled prevalence is estimated at a rate of 6.8% and occurred at rates between 1.3% and 47.4%. The data for overall elder abuse is 15.7% and is any combination of the five subtypes. We should be aware that elder abuse is a problem all over the world; it is not restricted to certain cultures or socio-economic circumstances.

A large number of crimes are never reported or recorded by criminal justice

	Number of studies	Number of countries	Total sample	Pooled prevalence estimates	95% CI
Overall elder abuse	44	26	59 203	15.7%	12.8-19.3
Physical	46	25	64 946	2.6%	1.6-4.4
Sexual*	15	12	43 332	0.9%	0.6-1.4
Psychological	44	25	60 192	11.6%	8.1-16.3
Financial*	52	24	45 915	6.8%	5.0-9.2
Neglect*	30	20	39 515	4.2%	2.1-8.1

*Pooled estimates presented here were adjusted for publication bias.

Table 2: Prevalence of abuse and its subtypes

elder abuse about half of the perpetrators are spouses but in financial abuse adult children are predominant among perpetrators. The mere fact is that children are often more important emotionally to their parents, than parents are to their children. As a result, parents

agencies (Kratcoski 2018). This is especially true for the domestic sphere which is a dark field resulting in many unreported cases of abuse. The home and private life are protected at all legal levels. There is no doubt that a high number of unreported cases exists behind closed doors. Furthermore, financial abuse is a matter of a private prosecution, i.e. complaints are made at one's own risk. Victims do not report financial abuse for several

reasons.

- ◆ The victim may not realize that he or she was victimized because they have no control over their assets.
- ◆ The victim may not report the crime because the victim does not want to get the family member into trouble.
- ◆ The victim is dependent on the services of the abuser and does not want to worsen the established living situation. A “web of interdependency” is often found as a strong emotional attachment between the abused and the abuser that often hinders efforts to ask for help.

Even if there is a criminal investigation, the victim can refuse to testify in court. We should never forget that the person identified as “victim” is a person with the right and freedom to choose what to do with her or his assets, at least if this person is not mentally incapacitated.

On the other hand, quite a substantial number of financial abuses in the family area is reported on advice and help lines – but mostly by outsiders (e.g. neighbors, including family doctors),

The case of the “Austrian Long Term Care cash allowance”:

and not by the victims themselves.

In Austria there exists a system of a “Long Term Cash allowance” system called ‘Pflegegeld’ and it is a consumer-directed program. High priority is given to ensure that the elderly cash allowance recipient is able to make autonomous decision on matters affect-

ing her or his financial circumstances even if the result is in conflict with family members.

No detailed data on budgets of private households are available, so there are only scarce information on how the long-term care allowance is spent are accessible. All the same, it seems to be rather evident that benefits are quite often passed along to family caregivers or are contributed to household budgets. In a study by Badelt et al. (1997) no less than 86% of family caregivers declare that they have direct or indirect access to the old person’s long-term care allowance, either through the receipt of regular payments or through joint handling of the household budget. Sharing the budget almost certainly implies that the children are the ones to make the final decisions. This practice cannot automatically be considered as a misuse of funds but sometimes it certainly is. Since this is a consumer-directed program, the beneficiaries are autonomous in their decisions. Nevertheless, most family caregivers have access to the older person’s allowance, whether they are formally authorized as a guardian to do so or not. Sometimes there is only a fine line drawn between the caregiver’s legitimate claim for remunerations and financial abuse.

In conclusion, the nature of abuse of the elderly is not just about the financial exploitation. It can also be physical impact (e.g. by severe overdoses of medication), psychological (e.g. by

intimidation, threats or expressions of contempt), emotional abuse (e.g. criticizing or shaming the elderly) or simply by restricting a person's free will (e.g. by preventing from choosing where they want to live or manipulating them in the drafting of their last free will).

It has to be taken into consideration that older persons are sensitive to the attitudes of persons caring for them. To prevent abusive situations, it is best when a caring person has the possibility to distance herself at least temporarily from the person to be cared for.

As far as financial crimes committed by strangers, the following well-known recommendations should be applied:

- ◆ Do not keep larger sums of money in the coffee pot or the keys to the house in the flower pot;
- ◆ Do not tell the public about your savings;

- ◆ Be critical about strangers;
- ◆ Not be fooled by fraudster, please keep in mind that people are not always honest;
- ◆ On the street, keep your handbag firmly under your arm etc.

As it is mentioned in the "National Report on Elder Abuse in Austria":

"For money, some people will do anything",

whether it is an abuse by financial exploitation within a community setting (mostly done by family members) or any other kind of abuse done by a fraudster. In any case, the elderly are a particularly vulnerable group and they need special protection from any kind of criminal activities.

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Violence Against Older Persons – Vulnerability in Old Age – Diagnosing Violence

THOMAS FRÜHWALD

“Elder Abuse is a single or repeated act, or the lack of appropriate action occurring in the context of a relationship in which mutual trust is expected, in which an older person experiences physical and / or psychological harm.

Violence against older persons is a human rights abuse and a significant cause of harm, sickness and despair.”
(The Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse. WHO, 2002)

Forms of Elder Abuse

Acts of violence are mostly multidimensional. One has to differentiate between

the various forms of violence:

Direct Violence:

- ◆ Certain concrete acts or lack thereof
- ◆ The perpetrator and the victim have a direct relationship
- ◆ It is mostly abuse as an active act

Structural Violence:

- ◆ Contrary to direct violence, it does not manifest itself immediately
- ◆ It is silent (L.Seidel, 2007), a still water (J.Galtung, 1984)
- ◆ Shows a great stability – social structures are lazy...
- ◆ Allows for many forms of direct violence
- ◆ It is enhanced by cultural violence

Cultural Violence:

- ◆ **Ageism**, discrimination of older persons, negative age stereotypes, deficit model of ageing: they all facilitate violence against older people
- ◆ Traditional view of **care of older persons** as a female role: blocks its professionalization and qualification

Direct violence has been classified into various forms (*Laura Seidel, 2007*).

Physical violence which is perhaps not as frequent as the other forms: it can be manifested as deliberately causing pain or as physical coercion, as exemplified by beating, applying physical restraints, placing unnecessary urinary catheters, forced feeding, forced medication, withholding shelter, comfort, abandonment (“granny dumping”).

Psychological abuse refers to verbal and emotional abuse as by yelling at, insulting, mocking, humiliating, abusing one’s sense of shame.

Financial abuse is f.e. controlling or using a person’s property, coercing him / her to make presents, change testaments.

Restriction of individual freedom and awareness of human rights like f.e. in institutions breaking the individual’s will (Erwing Goffman, 1961), isolating him / her from social contacts, imposing the place to live.

Another form of direct violence can be seen in understaffed care institutions with unmotivated, underqualified, underpaid nursing staff experiencing so called “carer abuse” by residents resulting in physical harm (scratching, hitting, verbal aggression) resulting in psychological stress and burnout.

Incidence and Prevalence of Abuse of Older Persons

In a metanalysis of 49 studies on abuse of older persons Cooper et al report that 6,3% of the >65 have experienced abuse

in the past month: 7 studies using valid assessment tools document significant psychological abuse in 25% of the vulnerable group of persons; 5% of the family carers admit having performed physical abuse on older persons in their care in the past year, 30% other forms of abuse; 16% of nursing home staff admit having performed psychological abuse; 80% of nursing home staff admit having observed acts of abuse by others - of those only 2% were documented and reported to superiors and only 1% were reported to authorities.

Recognizing abuse of and violence against older persons requires a high amount of awareness for the problem and good clinical judgment. As physician and nurse one has to rely on his / her own instinct in observing a situation of older persons being dealt with in care settings. (*Lachs MS et al: Elder abuse. Lancet. 2004; 364*)

Exact medical history and physical exam, and a competently performed geriatric functional assessment including cognitive functions are fundamental prerequisites of good diagnosis of abuse of *and* violence against the older person.

Intervention in cases of violence against older persons – some options:

(*Australian Society for Geriatric Medicine, Position Statement Elder Abuse, 2003*)

Crisis intervention:

- ◆ Immediate hospital admission (if possible to geriatric department)

- ◆ Acute admission to a nursing home (“respite care”)
- ◆ Perhaps immediate separation of victim from the care person

Ambulatory services: f.e.

- ◆ Home nursing care, home helpers
- ◆ Relieving the care burden and stress from carers
- ◆ Day care centers
- ◆ Consulting services
- ◆ Coaching, supervision
- ◆ Intervention by authorities: separating the persons involved, ombudsman institutions

Abuse of older persons is still a taboo. It is necessary to break the silence!

The victims keep silent because of various fears of reprisal, of triggering a conflict in the family, of becoming ignored and isolated, of being put into an institution. They feel exaggerated loyalty toward the carers, they fear becoming a burden to society.

Witnesses also keep silent: problems are being minimized, the suffering of older people is underestimated. The vic-

tims are considered being themselves responsible for the situation. They shun conflicts in the institution, they fear for their job after reporting an incident.

There still is a lack specialized structures making the involved more sensitive to the problem which should be expected especially in multidisciplinary geriatric teams of doctors, nurses, social workers. (McAlpine C: Elder Abuse and neglect. Editorial, *Age&Ageing* 2008; 37:132-133) Something like „Reporting Centers for Elder Abuse“ which exist in 94% of the communities in the Netherlands or „Adult Protection Services“ in den USA needs to be developed.

To keep silent about structural violence means to perpetuate and to escalate it. (R.Hirsch, 2003).

There should be a „Whistleblowing right“ in the structures of our health- and social care system.

Geriatric medicine could make an important contribution in raising the awareness about causes, consequences and possible interventions of abusing older persons – in analogy how pediatrics deals with the topic of child abuse.

Short Biography of the Speakers

Heinz Kurt Becker was born in 1950 in Baden. He is married and father of two children.

He started his professional career 1970 for a Japanese trading company in the Import/Export-Business with the Comecon countries. In 1974 he changed into the Marketing & Communication branch, working for international agencies and Philips Industries until 1992 when he opened his own agency. He handed over his firm to his wife when he took over the position of General Secretary for the Austrian Seniors Association / Seniorenbund in 2001. In 2011 he became Member of the European Parliament for the Austrian Peoples Party. In his 9 years' mandate he was Member of the Committees for Employment & Social Affairs, Petitions, Culture & Education as well as Interior, Migration, Security and Anti-Terrorism. In this period he acted also as Chair of the Parliamentarian Group against Anti-Semitism. He retired in the age of 69 in 2019. In 2013 he was elected Vice President of the European Senior's Union / ESU and re-elected this year 2024.

Edith Simöl is head of the Service Center for Digital Seniors at the Austrian Institute for Applied Telecommunications (ÖIAT) since 2017. The Service Centre is a central player in Austria that supports educational institutions, trainers and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of educational offers for senior citizens. Her work focuses on digital inclusion, adult education, conception and implementation of further training measures concerning digital media for older people.

As a psychologist and technology expert, Edith Simöl combines two different perspectives that are very important in digital senior education. On the one hand, her understanding of psychological aspects allows her to better understand the needs and requirements of users, which are important for the development of technical concepts. On the other hand, this hybrid access enables her to convey content effectively and promotes the acceptance and use of digital technologies among older people. She has different certificates in the education sector.

Josef Hörl was born in 1947 in Vienna, Austria. From 1997 until his retirement in 2012 he served as an Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Gerontology at Vienna University. He still lectures regularly. He is author of two books and more than 100 scientific papers.

He was involved in the implementation of the Austrian national governmental plan of action for the elderly and in several national and trans-European research projects, e.g. investigating services supporting family carers of elderly people (EUROFAMCARE). Other positions include holding the position of chairman for the Austrian section of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), an advisory function for the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs in matters of elder abuse prevention and intervention policies.

Thomas Frühwald got a graduation from the Medical University of Vienna, postgraduate training in internal medicine and geriatric medicine in Vienna and Geneva, postgraduate courses in medical ethics and palliative care. He is deputy chief of medicine at the Department of Geriatric Acute Care of the Hietzing Hospital, Vienna. In addition, he is lecturer in geriatric medicine and gerontology at the Medical University of Graz and the University of Applied Sciences in Vienna. In 1998 and 2002 he was Visiting Professor at the Department of Bioethics, University of California. Research interest in and publications on various general topics of geriatrics: nutrition, delirium, geriatric palliative care, ethics in geriatric medicine.

To name a few present functions: Board member of the Austrian Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology, Full Board member of the European Union Geriatric Medicine Society, member of the advisory group of experts on Geriatric Medicine to the Austrian Federal Ministry of Health, Member of the Human Rights Commission of the Austrian Ombudsboard (Volksanwaltschaft).

Supporting Organisations



NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna (CoA)



The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO)



European Federation of Older Persons (EURAG)



International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW)



Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)



International Federation on Ageing (IFA)



Soroptimist International (SI)



Society for the Advancement of Global Understanding (VfV)



Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO)



International Graduate Women (IGW)



European Federation of Older Students in Universities (EFOS)

A healthy planet



For future generations

NGO Committee on Sustainable Development Vienna (CSD)



International Inner Wheel (IIW)



International Council of Women Conseil International Des Femme (ICW-CIF)



Founded 1950

International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)



NGO Committee on the Status of Women Vienna



Unity of Pensioners of Slovakia, MO JDS Bratislava IV



Österreichisches Institut für angewandte Telekommunikation (ÖIAT)



digitaleSenior:innen Servicestelle für Bildungseinrichtungen



Associazione Donne e Scienza

United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)
Side Event 2024

Organised by the NGO Committee on Ageing, UN Vienna