

Financial abuse of elderly 'rampant, but invisible', says UN expert

Older people are increasingly subject to financial abuse, in many cases by their own family members, a United Nations human rights expert warned on Thursday.

“Financial [abuse of older persons](#) is rampant but largely invisible, and the problem is expected to grow dramatically with the ageing of our societies”, said the UN-appointed independent expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, in a statement to mark [World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#) on 15 June.

She says most abuse goes undetected, and it is impossible to say how big the problem is, as data is scarce because of under-reporting.

“Sadly, most abusers are family members”, said Ms. Kornfeld-Matte. “This is a particularly delicate matter”, she added, explaining that even experienced professionals have difficulty distinguishing an unwise but legitimate financial transaction, from an exploitative one that was the result of undue influence, duress, fraud, or a lack of informed consent.

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Financial abuse reflects a pattern of behaviour rather than a single event, and occurs over a period of time.

She said that older people may even tacitly acknowledge it, or feel that the perpetrator has some entitlement to their assets.

“Some older people also have a desire to compensate those who provide them with care, affection, or attention”, she said.

Ms. Kornfeld-Matte urged older people to report cases of abuse to the authorities, even though they feel embarrassed or fear retaliation, including withdrawal of affection and care.

“One of the few ways to stop financial abuse of older people is to report it. If you suspect that someone you care about has been or is being abused, I can only urge you to speak up”, she said.