



# Summary of RED C Public Awareness research findings 2017-2021

Promoting the Rights of Vulnerable Adults  
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I R E L A N D



Following are summaries of the findings of ongoing public awareness research commissioned by Safeguarding Ireland on attitudes to and understanding of safeguarding and abuse in Ireland between 2017 and Spring 2021.

Each body of research was part of a RED C omnibus survey on a representative sample of 1,000 adults (aged 18+) nationwide.

**The topics and dates of the public surveys from 2017-2021 are:**

- **Coercive Control – March 2021**
- **Legislation, a safeguarding authority and reporting – December 2020**
- **Abuse during COVID-19 – October 2020**
- **Planning of healthcare – June 2020**
- **Planning of place of care – February 2020**
- **Witnessing and calling out of abuse – May 2019**
- **Experience of planning ahead – October 2018**
- **Public beliefs on abuse – April 2017.**

# Awareness and understanding of Coercive Control

## – March 2021

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- **40% of public don't understand coercive control**
  - **30% have witnessed coercive control and 13% have a personal experience**
  - **Expanded laws for coercive control needed to protect more people, particularly the vulnerable.**
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The survey asked people their level of awareness and understanding of Coercive Control.

### Understanding

40% of people don't understand this type of abuse:

- 25% said they were not familiar with coercive control at all
- 15% said they had heard the term but did not understand it
- Just over a quarter (28%) said that they understood it.

### Experience

When provided with an explanation of coercive control:

- 30% said they had witnessed this happening to someone they knew
- 13% said they had experienced it themselves.

Almost a quarter of cases witnessed occurred outside of intimate relationships including between frail older people and family members, or in the care of people with intellectual or physical disabilities either at home or in an institution.

The research showed that despite a low level of understanding of coercive control, people could still readily recognise significant levels of this abuse occurring in settings outside of intimate relationships.

# Legislation, a safeguarding authority and reporting

## – December 2020

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- **Strong public support for strengthened safeguarding laws**
  - **Vast majority of public support establishing a national authority for safeguarding**
  - **Almost one in four do not know who to report adult abuse to.**
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The survey asked people their views on safeguarding laws, establishing a National Safeguarding Authority and reporting of abuse.

### Legislation

- 91% supported stronger laws to safeguard people from abuse or neglect
- 89% said more urgency was needed to deliver safeguarding laws and services.

### A safeguarding authority

- 85% supported an overall national authority on safeguarding
- 87% said a dedicated authority should have enforcement powers.

### Reporting

- 23% would not know who to report adult abuse to if they, or someone they knew, was a victim
- 70% said they would report abuse if it occurred to them personally
- 92% said they would encourage or help others to report abuse happening to them.

# Abuse during COVID-19

## – October 2020

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- **12% experienced adult abuse during first six months COVID-19**
  - **One third reported abuse during lifetime**
  - **Rise in cyber abuse during pandemic.**
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The survey asked people about experiences of abuse including cyber, emotional, financial, physical, psychological or sexual abuse, or neglect by another person or institution, since the COVID-19 pandemic began and / or prior to it (ever).

- 12% experienced abuse since the start of the pandemic in March 2020
- 32% reported ever experiencing any type of abuse or neglect
- There was a shift in the type of abuse people experienced during the pandemic period, with cyber abuse (internet, social media, online) becoming more common
- Women (especially younger women) were more likely to have ever experienced abuse than men. There was also a higher incidence amongst lower social class groups, the unemployed and those widowed / divorced / separated
- Among those who had experienced abuse, emotional and psychological (threatening, coercive, control or undue influence), were the most common forms
- Cyber abuse (internet / social media / online) was the third most common form during the pandemic compared to the fifth most common prior to March, becoming more reported than physical or sexual abuse.

# Planning of healthcare

– June 2020

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- **95% have not recorded plans for their future healthcare**
  - **COVID-19 has promoted more people to think about their future care.**
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The survey asked people to what extent they had planned ahead their future healthcare and the impact COVID-19 had on this.

- The vast majority (95%) had not taken steps to record their future care wishes. Almost a quarter (23%) had been prompted to think about doing so because of COVID-19
- 4% had completed the Think Ahead form
- 4% had completed an Advance Healthcare Directive
- During the first three months of the COVID-19 period the number who completed the Think Ahead form increased from 2% to 4%, and an additional 1% completed an Advance Healthcare Directive
- 23% said they were prompted to consider completing a Think Ahead form during COVID-19 and 14% an Advance Healthcare Directive
- 6% of people had in place an Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA), although 13% considered it during the initial months of COVID-19
- 30% of all adults had made a Will and this was higher among older people (71% among over 65s).

# Planning of place of care

## – February 2020

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- **80% had not considered where they would like to be cared for**
  - **70% confused about rights and decision-making when caring for frail adults.**
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The survey asked people about to what extent they had planned ahead their future healthcare and understood protocols about decision making and capacity.

- 80% had not thought, or talked about, where they would like to be cared for if they became seriously ill or frail
- 70% were confused about decision-making and consent when caring for a seriously ill or frail older person
- 21% had personally considered where their preferred place of care would be if they were seriously ill or nearing death
- 17% had discussed this with a family member, friend, or other trusted person
- 5% had documented their preference
- Consideration of place of care was higher among older adults (65+), but still just 43% had considered it, 35% had discussed it and 9% had documented their wishes.

When asked if a family member has authority to make decisions for someone who is frail but still has decision-making capacity without their consent -

- 30% incorrectly said that yes the family member does have this authority
- 28% did not know
- Just 40% correctly recognised that the decision continues to lie fully with the person as long as they have decision-making capacity.

Asked where their preferred place of care would be respondents showed a strong preference for home over institutional care.

- 85% said they would prefer to be cared for at home with the necessary supports
- 55% in the home of a family member
- 33% in a hospice
- 25% in a nursing home
- 19% in a hospital.



# Witnessing and calling out of adult abuse

– May 2019

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- **Tougher laws would encourage more people to ‘call out’ abuse of vulnerable adults**
  - **10% have witnessed abuse of a vulnerable adult in the past year**
  - **Public seeks dedicated 24-hour helpline for adult abuse.**
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Based on our adult population (aged 18+) of approximately 3.8m, this would imply an estimate of potentially 380,000 witnessed cases of adult abuse per annum.

The survey asked if people had witnessed abuse and what they would do if they did.

- 10% had witnessed adult abuse in the past year
- 81% said tougher laws would encourage them to take greater action to combat abuse
- 12% of those who witnessed abuse of a vulnerable adult in the past year did nothing at all
- 47% discussed abuse they witnessed with the person being abused, 40% discussed it with a trusted person, 15% sought professional advice – and 3% reported what they witnessed to an authority such as the HSE or Gardaí.



# Experience of planning ahead

– October 2018

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- **Almost half have not planned ahead to safeguard their future**
  - **Just 6% have appointed an Enduring Power of Attorney.**
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- 11% were aware of what an Advance Healthcare Directive is
  - 22% reported having a personal pension
  - 27% had made a Will
  - 7% were aware of the 'Think Ahead' resource.

The survey asked about what steps people had taken to plan ahead to help safeguard their future.

- Almost half did not have any of the recommended 'planning for the future' measures in place This was particularly the case for younger people (18-44), lower social classes and women
- 6% had legally nominated a family member, or friend to be their Attorney (under Enduring Power of Attorney)
- 8% had discussed a preferred place of care (at home, or nursing home) with family, friends, or an appointed Attorney for if they developed a serious, or long-term illness.

# Public beliefs on abuse

– April 2017

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- **Irish public believes abuse of vulnerable adults is widespread**
  - **Half say they have experienced the abuse of vulnerable adults either through being abused themselves or seeing somebody.**
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The survey asked about the beliefs and experiences of abuse in Ireland.

- 1 in 2 claimed experience of vulnerable adult abuse to either themselves (as a vulnerable adult) or somebody close to them
- Physical abuse of vulnerable adults had been witnessed/suspected by 1 in 3, this is highest within peoples' private dwellings
- Emotional abuse was the most common of all the abuse types with over 1 in 3 having experienced it
- The majority (61%) felt that vulnerable adults were well protected in Irish society, however just under 2 in 5 (38%) thought that they were badly treated
- 1 in 3 believe vulnerable adult abuse to be widespread
- There was widespread uncertainty around what constitutes emotional and financial abuse
- Lack of clarity regarding the point of contact for reporting vulnerable adult maltreatment was reported by 1 in 3, with those under 35 years significantly less likely to have felt they knew the appropriate avenue.



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