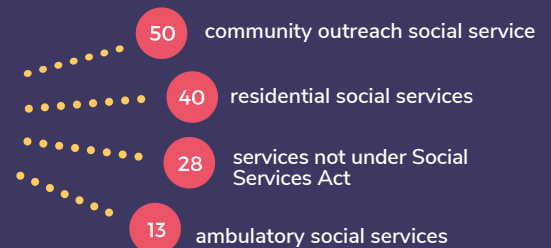




ELDER ABUSE AND DISCRIMINATION

During October and November 2020, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights conducted a survey mapping the phenomenon of elder abuse and discrimination against older people through the experience of organisations working with or for elderly. At the same time, the survey was mapping capacities and challenges these organisations face while providing assistance to victims of abuse or discrimination. Totally, 131 organizations providing various types of social services to elderly responded to the survey.

131
organizations
providing



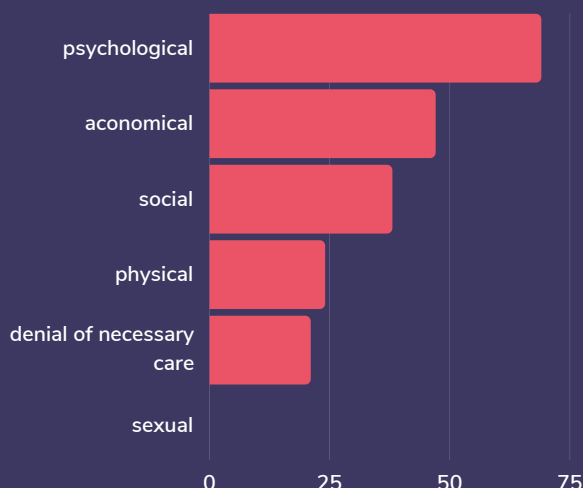
52 %
respondents
reported experience
with abuse

44 %
respondents
reported experience
with discrimination

52 % of respondents reported experience with elder abuse and 44 % stated experience with discrimination against elderly. While only 48 % of the representatives from organisations under the umbrella of the Union of Slovak Pensioners encountered violence, in the case of ambulatory social service providers it was 85 %.

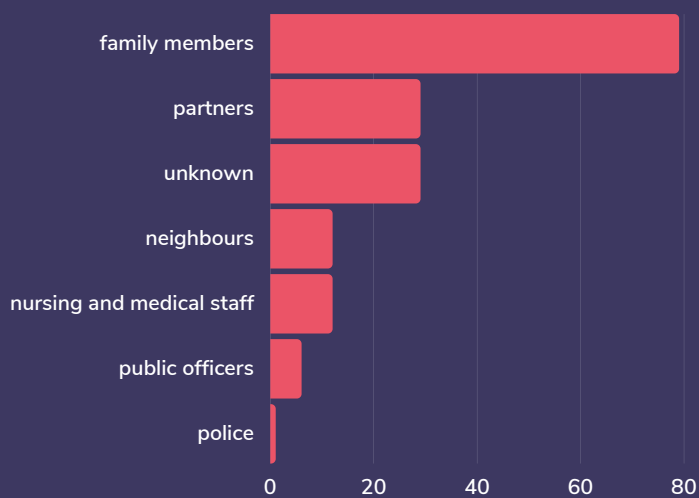
ELDER ABUSE

**WHAT TYPES OF ABUSE ARE WE TALKING ABOUT
AND WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?**



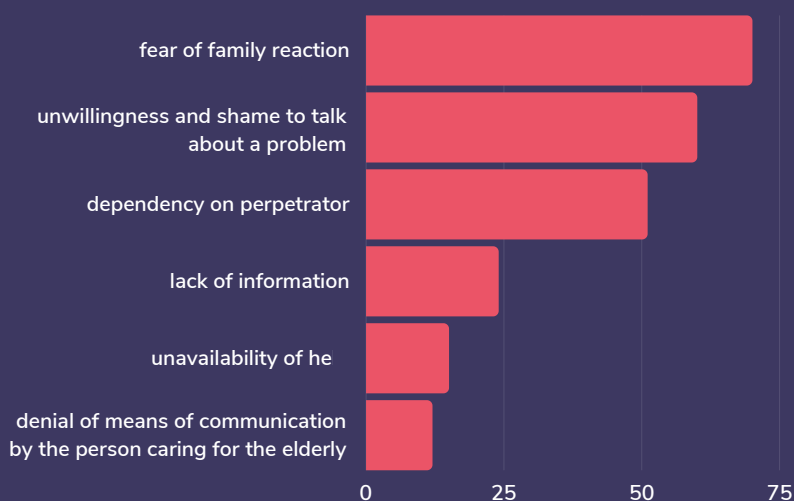
Forms of reported abuse

As many as 69 % of respondents who have encountered violence against older people in their practice have identified psychological violence, including humiliation, contemptuous treatment or acts causing fear and stress. The second most common type of abuse reported by 47 % of respondents is economic violence which involves withholding of income and obstructions in property use. Economic violence is followed by social violence (e.g. isolation from friends and other social contacts or constant monitoring) which was confirmed by 38 % of organizations. Physical violence was mentioned by 24 % of respondents and denial of care by 21 %. The addressed organizations did not confirm any experience with sexual violence against older people.



Perpetrators of abuse

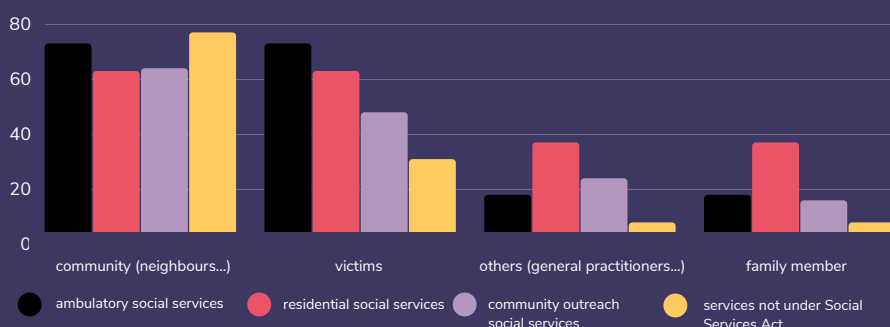
According to the respondents, the most common perpetrators are family members (89 %) and partners (29 %). Public officers (in various types of state services) were minimally reported as perpetrators. Furthermore, only 29 % of respondents mentioned unknown perpetrators, in all other cases the perpetrators were familiar persons with whom the victims can have a close relationship or they are dependent on them.



Reasons for unreported violence

Older people often do not report the abuse they experience. According to the organizations, the main reasons are fear of the family's and environment's reaction (70 %) and shame and unwillingness to talk about their situation (60 %). Other important factors are dependence on the perpetrator mentioned by 51 % of respondents, the lack of information on available help and assistance (41 %) and the inaccessible help (15 %). These data alone already point to the shortcomings of the system protecting the elderly from violence.

HOW DO THE ORGANIZATIONS KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE?



Sources of information about committed violence according to the type of service provided

Despite the obstacles mentioned above, 53 % of respondents learn about the acts of violence from seniors themselves, direct reporting by the survivors confirmed mostly organisations providing ambulatory services (73 %). The community around older people also plays an important role as 68 % of respondents recognize it as a source of information about the committed violence. Abuse reported by family members or other persons involved was confirmed by 21 % and 23 % of respondents respectively. In case of facilities providing residential social services it is twice as often compared to the other types of organizations.

Recommendation of the Centre:



As the community and the close environment play an important role in reaching out to competent people and seeking help, they need to be able to identify cases of violence and know what steps are effective and necessary. The Centre recommends to raise awareness by carrying out information campaigns for general public.

WHAT KIND OF ASSISTANCE THE ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE

The most common forms of assistance to the victims of violence are:

- 41 various forms of counselling – social counselling (15), unspecified counselling
- 3 provision of alternative housing
- 25 providing contact information for competent organizations and the police and contacting them directly
- 3 managing situation internally in the residential facility
- 7 providing psychological support
- 2 dialogue with the family and continuous monitoring of a senior

The most effective aid is a comprehensive assistance, which includes several of the abovementioned steps. 11 respondents submitted a detailed description of such assistance. As many as 30 organizations answered that they had not yet encountered violence against older people.



The municipal field work social services proposed following comprehensive solution to violence:

"Assuring the senior of full confidence of the social worker. Encouragement to talk about the problem. Counselling. Assistance in reaching out to other family members, if the situation requires. Contacting experts - a psychologist, providing alternative housing, cooperation in filing a criminal report against the offender - assistance in securing a lawyer if necessary. Regular monitoring of the senior and follow-up after the problem has been solved - checking whether the violence did not reappear."

In most cases, organizations cooperate with other institutions to deal with the cases of violence. 30 respondents from those who encountered abuse said they have good experiences especially with the police. Another mentioned institutions were local governments (18), social guardianship and organizational units of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (11), and local general practitioners (8).

According to the organizations following steps are needed, in order to increase the elderly protection:

- 43 raising awareness among older people especially in the field of various types of fraud
- 11 strengthening empathy in the society and raising awareness of different aspects of elderly abuse
- 13 field work
- 9 creating a familiar environment in which older people are not afraid to talk about their problems



Local governments play a critical role in preventing and tackling violence against the elderly, as it connects understanding of the local community and the possibility of providing an adequate form of social services according to the needs of citizens. Social field work provided by local authority has a potential to detect cases of domestic violence and to act preventively at the same time.



Recommendations of the Centre:

Information campaigns targeting older people should focus not only on the protection against fraud and theft, but also on psychological violence and other forms of abuse by close persons.

Providing education and training for social workers to gain adequate “know-how” on tackling crisis situations of domestic violence and on available assistance options.

Strengthening the existing support network to enable a rapid provision of safety for victims of domestic violence, for example via temporary housing.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE SERVICES?

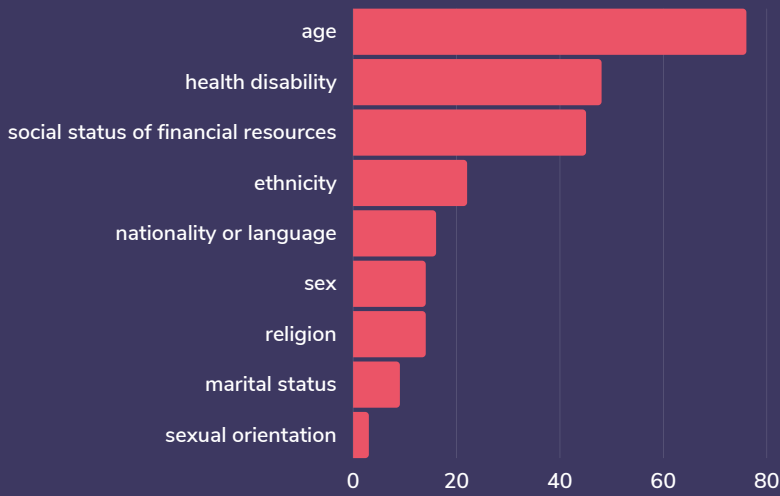
Respondents formulated following necessary steps to provide better services:

- 29 changes in legislation (system of financing in social services, reduction of the number of clients per worker in the facility, more flexible placement of the client in the facility even without assessment of dependency, adjustment of home care rules for dependent persons and higher care benefits, enabling better care of elderly by close family members through higher social benefits, reduction of administrative burdens; deinstitutionalisation of social care)
- 16 better cooperation with the relevant institutions, in particular with municipalities
- 13 more financial support



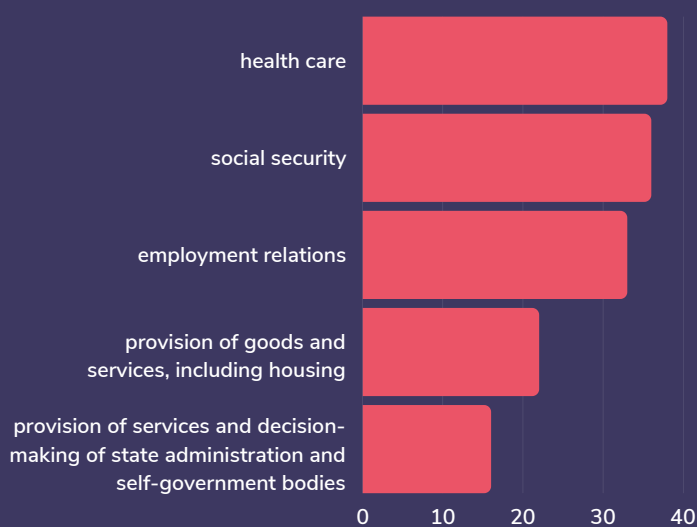
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ELDERLY

WHEN DOES DISCRIMINATION OCCUR?



Recorded cases of suspected discrimination against seniors by ground of discrimination

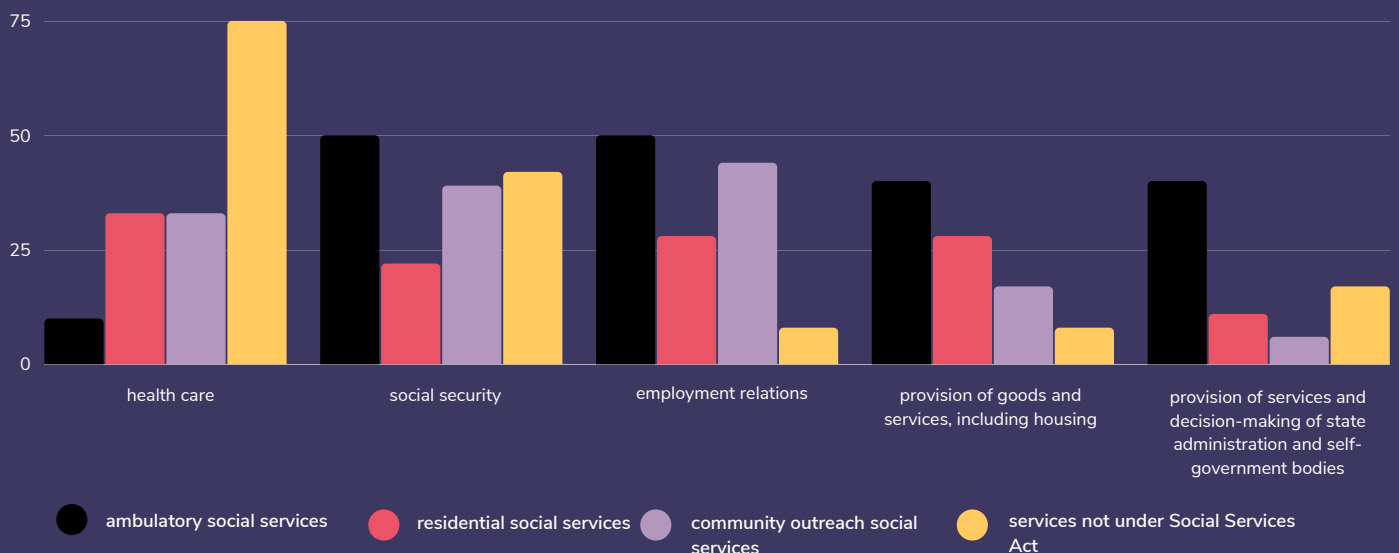
Fewer organizations suspected discrimination (44 %) in comparison with elderly abuse. Based on the experiences, age was identified as the most dominant ground of discrimination (76 % of those who reported experience of discrimination), then disability (48 %) and social status or financial resources (45 %). Other protected grounds of discrimination appeared sparsely.



Areas of suspected discrimination

When looking at the different areas of discrimination, access to health care (38 %) and social security (36 %) predominate. This is most notable in organizations not providing services under the Social Services Act. Other organizations also reported suspected discrimination in employment relations and in the goods and services provision. Organizations experience fewer cases of discrimination in the provision of services and decision-making by state administration and local bodies.

Areas of suspected discrimination (by type of social service)



How do the organizations help?

The survey revealed limitations in organizations' awareness of the possibilities of resolving suspected discrimination. They most often stated that they would provide advice, social counselling or provide information which institutions older people can address. Only five organizations stated that they would provide legal advice within their capabilities or consult the situation with lawyers. Five organizations cited discussion as a form of discrimination assistance.

With whom the organizations cooperate?

The institutions with which organizations have good experience in dealing with cases of discrimination are the same as in the cases of violence. Local governments (17) and the police (11) are most often cited. The Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities was mentioned by one organization. The Office of the Public Defender of Rights and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights were not mentioned at all.



Recommendation of the Centre:

Raise awareness of the ways of tackling discrimination and of the competent institutions providing legal assistance in case of suspected discrimination including, in particular, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, the Office of the Public Defender of Rights or the Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and to increase the accessibility of these institutions for the target group.



Significant proportion of respondents do not recognize discrimination as a legal problem which means that the support provided may not be adequate and effective. The competences of the police to which the respondents turn are minimal in matters related to the violation of the principle of equal treatment, except in specific cases, as they are not covered by the Criminal Procedure Code but by the Code of Civil Procedure.



**SLOVAK NATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS**

Information provided in this leaflet is from the publication Elder Abuse and Discrimination, published by the Slovak National Center for Human Rights.



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