

Nursing Home Abuse Statistics

Although nursing home abuse is a well-known problem, many still underestimate how common it is. Fortunately, elder abuse statistics in nursing homes allow us to better understand the overall issue and why it occurs.

Elder abuse statistics in nursing homes provide snapshots of why abuse occurs, who is most at risk, and what can be done if someone is suffering from abuse.

“Elder abuse will not stop on its own. Someone else needs to step in and help.”

– National Institute on Aging (NIA)

Our team has compiled and organized statistics on nursing home abuse from leading organizations like the National Council on Aging (NCOA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA).

Use these statistics to get answers to your questions and learn how you can help. If your loved one is suffering from abuse and neglect, speak with a trusted nursing home abuse lawyer in confidence.

How Common Is Nursing Home Abuse?

Nursing home abuse affects thousands of families each year. In 2020 alone, over 15,000 complaints filed with nursing home ombudsmen were about abuse or neglect.

A 2018 National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) report states that people living in nursing homes are vulnerable to various forms of abuse by staff and other residents alike.

The NCVC’s breakdown of nursing home abuse complaints is as follows:

- 29% – Physical abuse
- 22% – Resident-on-resident abuse (physical or sexual)
- 21% – Psychological abuse
- 14% – Gross neglect
- 7% – Sexual abuse
- 7% – Financial exploitation

Nursing home abuse is just one part of the larger problem of elder abuse. As many as 5 million people are affected by elder abuse every single year, according to the NCOA.

Like all other crimes, though, not every case of nursing home abuse gets reported, and researchers are trying to determine exact figures. This is further complicated because some seniors may be unwilling — or unable — to report their experiences.

“Unfortunately, we simply do not know for certain how many people are suffering from elder abuse and neglect.”

– The National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA)

Who Is at Risk?

Elderly abuse in nursing homes statistics suggest that any older person in an assisted living facility may suffer from nursing home abuse. That said, some may be at a higher risk than others. Examples of risk factors that increase the chances are outlined in the following statistics on elder abuse in nursing homes.

Gender

Women are more likely to be abused than men. In fact, the NCVS found that 66% of elder abuse victims were women.

Socioeconomic Status

Researchers have found a link between lower socioeconomic status and elder abuse. For example, elderly people who rely on Medicaid to receive nursing home care may wind up staying at lower-quality facilities.

Past Trauma

Individuals who were abused or experienced traumatic events in the past are more likely to become abuse victims again.

Health Problems

Poor mental and physical health may increase the risk of abuse. Those who have Alzheimer’s disease or dementia are particularly vulnerable to abuse. The NCOA and NCEA report that nearly 50% of elders with dementia experience abuse or neglect.

Who Does the Abusing?

Anyone can commit elder or nursing home abuse, but family members and nursing home staff are some of the most common offenders.

Family Members

Unfortunately, family members are behind many cases of elder abuse. The NCOA found that relatives account for 6 of every 10 elder abuse cases. In 66% of these cases, a spouse or adult child is the perpetrator. Mental health and substance abuse problems may increase the risk of elder mistreatment.

In-Home Caregivers

As an alternative to nursing home living, nurses or other caregivers can be hired to help an older person in their own home. However, these caregivers may also commit neglect or abuse.

Nursing Home Staff Members

Staff members who are frustrated, exhausted, or manipulative may harm the residents they're supposed to care for. A 2020 WHO study found that over 64% of nursing home staff members admitted to committing some form of abuse or neglect.

Other Nursing Home Residents

Staff members are not the only ones to worry about in long-term care facilities — other residents are just as capable of committing abuse. For example, in 2021, a nursing home resident who was also a registered sex offender assaulted another resident multiple times. In this case, the nursing home was also at fault, as administrators failed to report the assaults to the police.

Environments That Can Lead To Abuse

While abuse can happen anywhere and to anyone, some environmental factors described below can increase the likelihood of abuse.

Poor-Quality Nursing Homes

Nursing homes and care facilities that lack proper resources and trustworthy staff can create a higher risk of elder abuse. For example, chronic understaffing causes employee stress, burnout, and resentment, often leading to abuse and neglect.

Negative employee attitudes can foster unsympathetic environments for residents. Additionally, ineffective administration and policies can allow abuse to go unreported.

Social Isolation

Elders are more likely to be abused if they don't have relatives or close friends checking in on them often. Family and friends can monitor for possible signs of nursing home abuse or neglect more efficiently through regular visits.

Household Size

The NCEA reports that the more people living in a household with an older person, the greater the risk of elder abuse.

Elder Abuse and COVID-19

Sadly, COVID-19 only worsened the already widespread problem of elder abuse. Pandemic-related elderly abuse statistics in nursing homes point to even more cases than before.

“Rates of abuse of older people have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

–**World Health Organization (WHO)**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that as many as 1 in 5 seniors experienced elder abuse during the pandemic, an increase of 83.6% from before COVID-19.

Reasons for increased nursing home abuse and neglect during the pandemic include:

- Anxiety over contracting the virus
- Financial hardship
- Reduced access to care and supplies
- Social isolation
- Staffing shortages

If your loved one suffered from nursing home abuse or neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic, you may still be able to get justice. But don't wait — there are time limitations to take legal action. Get a free legal case review today.

Nursing Home Abuse Statistics by Type

Nursing home abuse comes in many forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and financial, and it is not always obvious. Below, get statistics about the different types of nursing home abuse.

Physical Nursing Home Abuse Statistics

Physical nursing home abuse occurs when a patient is harmed by force (such as a shove, punch, or slap). It can lead to long-term health problems like concussions, broken bones, or even death.

- A recent study reported that 24.3% of residents experienced at least one instance of physical abuse while in a nursing home.
- Outside of nursing homes, spouses or partners made up nearly 60% of all perpetrators of physical abuse, according to the NCVC.
- Physical elder abuse cases seem to be increasing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that assaults against men aged 60 or older increased by 75% from 2002 to 2016. There was an over 35% increase in physical assaults against older women in the same time frame.

Emotional Nursing Home Abuse Statistics

Elders can also be emotionally abused with threats, intimidation, social isolation, and more.

- Emotional abuse was the most prevalent type reported by nursing home staff members, according to the 2020 WHO study. Nearly 1 out of 3 staff members admitted to emotionally abusing residents.
- Verbal abuse was the most commonly-reported type of elder mistreatment committed by family members, according to a study by the NCEA.
- 60% of self-reported elder abuse cases involved verbal or emotional harm, according to the NCVC.

Sexual Nursing Home Abuse Statistics

Sexual abuse is any form of unwanted sexual contact from another person.

- Sexual abuse was the least commonly reported form of abuse in the 2020 WHO study. Less than 2% of nursing home residents (or their representatives) reported sexual abuse cases. Staff reports of sexual abuse were under 1%.
- The vast majority of those who commit sexual abuse in nursing homes are men, according to a 2015 study. However, some women were also found to have committed sexual abuse.
- Those who commit sexual abuse in nursing homes or skilled nursing facilities may target residents who have disabilities or illnesses such as dementia.
- Nursing home residents aged 79 and older were at a higher risk of sexual abuse, according to the 2015 study.

Though it is very upsetting, being aware of sexual abuse in nursing homes statistics is the best way to make sure your loved one does not fall victim.

Connect with an experienced nursing home abuse lawyer in confidence if you suspect abuse.

Financial Nursing Home Abuse Statistics

Financial abuse happens when an individual's financial resources are exploited or withheld.

- Elders are more likely to report financial abuse than any of the other forms, according to the NCOA.
- The NCEA reported that family members were by far the most likely people to abuse elders financially. Nearly 60% of all elder financial abuse cases involved a family member.
- 1 in 20 older adults indicated they had suffered from financial abuse, according to the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA).

Statistics About Nursing Home Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide an elder's basic life necessities, such as food, housing, health care, or hygiene. While it may not always be intentional, nursing home neglect can have just as serious consequences as abuse.

- Similar to how elder abuse is broken up by type, the NAPSA breaks down neglect into subsets. These include physical, emotional, and financial neglect, as well as elder abandonment (when a caregiver leaves an older adult alone) and self-neglect.
- 12% of nursing home staff members reported neglecting the needs of residents, according to a 2020 WHO report. Nearly 12% of residents or their families also reported nursing home neglect cases in the same study.
- According to a 2014 review of previous studies, neglect had the highest rates of any other type of elder mistreatment in the United States.

- Not every state has the same definition of elder or nursing home neglect. The NAPSA recommends checking local definitions with your state’s Adult Protective Services (APS) program to learn more.

After learning these alarming statistics, many people wonder if you can sue for nursing home neglect. The answer depends on several factors, which must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Connecting with a trusted nursing home abuse law firm is the best way to find out what legal options you and your loved one have.

Consequences of Elder & Nursing Home Abuse

No matter where elder abuse occurs — in a nursing home or a personal residence — it can devastate a senior’s life and cause a lot of pain for their family. It can also lead to wide-ranging financial problems.

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“Elder abuse triples the risk of premature death and causes unnecessary illness, injury, and suffering.”

–**The National Center for Victims of Crime**

Health-Related Consequences

- Victims of elder abuse are 300% more likely to die than those who were not harmed.
- Hospitalization is 3 times as likely to occur if an elder is abused.
- Elders who have been abused are 4 times more likely to end up in a nursing home.
- Abuse can also lead to future disabilities and medical issues.
- The NCEA found that elders suffering from higher abuse rates were at an increased risk of depression and other psychological problems.

Economic Consequences

- The NCOA reports that at least \$36.5 billion is lost each year due to cases of elder financial abuse
- Violent crime injuries among elders are responsible for \$5.3 billion in annual medical costs.
- The NAPSA notes that these numbers do not account for financial losses due to other types of abuse, meaning the total may be much higher.

Why Aren't Elder and Nursing Home Abuse Cases Reported?

One of the more unsettling nursing home abuse and neglect statistics is that the NCVS found that for every case of elder abuse that's reported, 24 are not.

Reporting rates are so low for a few reasons:

Mental or Physical Impairments

Problems like dementia, deafness, or blindness can all make it harder for nursing home residents to properly file reports or identify perpetrators.

Fear of Retaliation

Even if a resident is not impaired, they may fear that the abuser will find out if they file a report and inflict even more harm.

This is why it's crucial for loved ones to regularly monitor the well-being of a resident and report nursing home abuse if necessary. Local APS branches, a long-term care ombudsman, and even the police can help families address possible cases of nursing home abuse head-on.

Families can also work with nursing home abuse lawyers to pursue financial compensation and justice for the harm done to their loved one.

Nursing Home Abuse Is a Growing Danger

The population of adults aged 65 and older is expected to increase over the next several decades. This suggests that the issues of elder and nursing home abuse are likely to become even more prominent.

“The global population of people aged 60 years and older will more than double, from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050.”

–World Health Organization (WHO)

However, family members and loved ones can take steps to protect their loved ones.

Here's what to do if you or someone you know is being abused:

- Review the nursing home statistics above and note if you or a loved one is at risk
- Tell someone you trust
- Keep a record and evidence of the abuse if you can
- Report the abuse to proper authorities in your state

You may also wish to consider seeking legal assistance.

Nursing Home Abuse Legal Options

Victims of nursing home abuse and neglect often cannot defend themselves without help. They might not want to risk angering the nursing home staff and making things worse for themselves. They could also be unable to take legal action due to cognitive problems like Alzheimer's.

If you suspect your loved one is suffering from abuse in a nursing home, take the first step and contact a lawyer you trust.



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Nursing Home Abuse Justice Team

Nursing Home Abuse Justice was founded to shine a light on nursing home and elder abuse. Every day, thousands of people in nursing homes and assisted living facilities are abused. Our team helps educate seniors and their loved ones on the common causes, signs and preventions of nursing home abuse. We report on real-world studies and current events from respected news outlets to expose this national problem.

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