

Report from Serbia
World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2009
“My World...Your World... Our World – Free of Elder Abuse”

On 12th of June this year, the Red Cross of Serbia and HumanaS network organised a round table discussion called **“My World,...Your World... Our World – Free of Elder Abuse”**, referring to the 15th June, the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The event was organised with the financial support of Help the Aged organisation. This is the third time this date is marked in Serbia (and the fourth time it is being marked globally). The event was announced to The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, which ensured Serbia was part of the global action this year.

The meeting included a presentation of the survey about the older people's awareness of discrimination, the presentation of Norwegian psychiatrist Wenche Malmedal on the issue of non-adequate care in Norwegian retirement institutions, the presentation of the centre for Social Welfare on their protocols as well as the presentation of the health services on the duties of medical doctors once they identify abuse of older people. A representative of the Republic Institute for Social Welfare presented the statistics of the noted cases of elderly abuse in Serbia. The point made is that the number of noted cases is very low due to the prevailing feeling of shame many victims have.

At the discussion the Red Cross of Serbia presented the results of a survey done in eight cities of Serbia where its volunteers polled 250 older people on the topic of abuse (please find attached the presentation with the most important data).

It is worth noting that the volunteers in question were also older people which made sure the trust issues between them and the polled people were less important. The survey result that demonstrates that 44% of all the polled people have learned of the existence of abuse through media is a clear sign for the civil sector that our task is to increase our efforts to educate and sensitize the media, make them avoid sensationalist discourse and additional stigmatization of abused older people.

It is also clear that there is a cause for alarm after learning that as high as 32% of older people have been exposed to some form of abuse, with the most frequent form being verbal abuse (11.2%) The polled older people have stressed that they hate being called names, made fun of and called stupid or illiterate. It takes place not just within families but in the general communities too.

As for prevention, 52% of the polled older people think that ‘everybody’, meaning both public and civil sector should play a role in prevention. What is slightly strange is that virtually no one thinks that health institutions and health workers should have a role in prevention of the abuse of older people even though we know that medical workers are legally obliged to report abuse if they suspect it has taken place.

The round table discussion had around seventy participants and was well covered by media. Vecernje Novosti, Danas, Borba, B92, RTS, Pink and Kopernikus have all written about it or broadcasted footage.

Starting 15th of June, HumanaS volunteers all over Serbia will be handing out leaflets aimed and sensitizing the public in relation to the abuse of older people in Serbia.

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