

**Briefing Paper**  
**The Cost of living:**  
**'growing up is free, growing old is expensive'**



*Daughter has changed the locks to the house and will not allow her mother access. She wants her mother to give her the house. She is being bullied to give up her home.*

**Key points:**

- Financial Abuse is defined by Action on Elder Abuse as stealing from, defrauding someone of, or coercing someone to part with, money, goods and/or property.
- There has been a 150% increase in reports of financial abuse to the charity's helpline in the last year.
- 680 calls to our helpline during the twelve months of 2013 show that:

**£6,403,343** was reported as stolen, defrauded, or coerced from elderly victims.

49 houses were sold or taken without consent (equivalent to **£8,557,681** worth of property).

An additional 57 houses were given away under pressure, including blackmail, or without full awareness (equivalent to **£9,805,995** worth of property).

The total monetary value involved is estimated to be **£24,767,019**.

- The majority of victims were women aged over 75 years, with 34% over 85. **Six victims were over 100 years of age, and the oldest was 103 years old.**
- The majority of perpetrators (343) were sons and/or daughters or other family members (100)
- Most theft occurred in people's own homes (563 cases), with 63 cases in care homes.

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**Case study:**

Maria Walbrin  
Age 93 years – born 12 April 1921  
£29,000 life savings allegedly stolen by friend/carer

She is 95% blind and deaf, giving evidence in court by video link  
Court hearing adjourned until December 2014

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### **What is Financial Abuse?**

Financial Abuse is defined by Action on Elder Abuse as stealing from, defrauding someone of, or coercing someone to part with, money, goods and/or property

Financial abuse can:

- involve the direct theft of money and/or other possessions from an older person.
- involve the withholding of benefits belonging to the older person.
- involve the misuse of Power of Attorney and other systems giving power to a third party to act financially on behalf of an older person
- involve older people being forced to sell their homes, having their homes sold against their wishes, or significant assets from the value of the property removed without their consent or knowledge.
- involve older people being tricked into scam/rogue investments.

The outcome on older people can be devastating. Many lose large sums of money, lose property they have lived in for years, do not receive benefits to which they are entitled, incur large debts or simply do not have enough money to live on. In some cases the impact results in death.

### **Financial Abuse: The Reality**

- ❑ A Cleaner coerced the victim to change her will, to inherit her entire estate of £170,000.
- ❑ A Daughter has taken over £16,000 from her mother's bank account, leaving the mother with only her pension income.
- ❑ Son took £78,000 from his father over a 6 year period. He has also set up another bank account for pensions to be paid into and has run up an overdraft of around £15,000, all in his father's name.
- ❑ After the daughter obtained Power of Attorney for her parents, they were moved into a care home. Last year, the mother died and the daughter sold the parent's house for £300,000. The father has subsequently been left with only £30,000, as the daughter also receives the father's pension, which totals £3,000 pa.
- ❑ Daughter conned her father out of £100,000 on the basis that the money would be repaid from a large compensation payment that he would receive, which never materialised. Daughter has been asking for more money.
- ❑ Daughter persuaded her father to live with her in France and to give her money to convert farm buildings into self contained accommodation for him. Even though the money was supposed to be a loan, repayments have stopped. Hence, the father has made losses of over £50,000.

- ❑ A grandmother has in the past agreed to sell her house to her grandson at half its value because she was no longer able to keep up with the mortgage. However, this was on the verbal understanding that she could stay there for life. Victim has been forced out and is now homeless.
- ❑ The victim's house originally had 5 bedrooms, but it has been converted into a two bedroom house for the mother and her son. The 3 bedroom unit was to be sold. However, her daughter has said she will move into it for £50,000 even though it is valued at £180,000. The daughter is said to be virtually blackmailing her mother and has threatened to stop helping her.
- ❑ Son made unauthorised ATM withdrawals from his mother's bank account. He has also persuaded his mother to sign an expensive phone contract and other agreements such as a car loan of £16,000 from Barclays. Victim is being pressed for repayments but does not have the money to repay.
- ❑ Victim has given £80,000 to his ex-gardener, who is believed to have groomed the victim by engaging in intimate activity with him.
- ❑ Carer moved the victim into her own home without the family's knowledge. The carer had been declared bankrupt, and was added as a beneficiary in the victim's will. There have also been a number of unexpected withdrawals from the victim's bank accounts.

### **Financial Abuse: The Property**

#### **Victims' houses:**

- 35% of the thieves live in the victim's property and refuse to leave
- 24% of the victims' houses were sold or taken without the victims' consent
- 17% of the victims' gave away their property under pressure (including blackmail) or without full awareness
- 16% of thieves were attempting to take over the victims' property at the time of the call
- The thieves had taken a percentage of the ownership of the victims' house in 5% of the cases
- In 3% of the cases the house had been re-mortgaged by the abuser.

### **Financial Abuse: Statutory Interventions**

Financial Abuse would fall within the remit of Adult Protection policies, procedures and systems. However, adult protection does not have the same statutory basis as child protection and there are limited means of protecting someone who is not covered by either the Mental Capacity or Mental Health Acts. Despite the evidence, the Government has refused to introduce new powers of protection (unlike in Scotland).

AEA's experience is that many alleged perpetrators of large-scale financial abuse rarely deny having access to or spending large amounts of money belonging to a particular older person. They merely contend that the older person gave them permission to spend the money in question. But the vulnerability of the victim means that they are often unable to categorically deny that such permission was given. The likelihood of such cases being progressed through to a satisfactory outcome i.e. full recovery of assets and a criminal prosecution of the perpetrator remain very low.