



Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development  
Association de Coopération et de Recherche pour le Développement  
Agencia para Cooperación e de Pesquisa para o Desenvolvimento

**ACORD**

## **Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

ACORD recognises that abuse of the vulnerable, whether poor, women, children or vulnerable adults is a world-wide phenomenon. One of ACORD's aims is to reduce vulnerability and to this end recognises the importance of having a vulnerable adults protection policy and works to create a safe environment for vulnerable adults who benefit from ACORD programmes.

Concern for the safety and well-being of vulnerable adults is an important part of ACORD's work, and it is essential as part of this concern, that everyone recognises that all vulnerable adults have a right to protection from abuse, violence and exploitation.

It is never acceptable for vulnerable adults to be abused and ACORD must take steps to prevent abuse wherever it can, by:

- ◆ Avoiding situations where abuse is possible
- ◆ Raising awareness in all programmes to ensure that abuse is not occurring
- ◆ Create a safe environment for vulnerable adults who benefit from ACORD programmes.

Therefore, it is crucial that everyone connected with ACORD understands the problem of vulnerable adults' abuse and their own role and responsibilities in protecting vulnerable adults and preventing abuse. This document sets out ACORD's policy on working with vulnerable adults and managing issues of vulnerable adults' abuse.

The policy and guidance provided in this document applies to all ACORD staff, internationally and nationally appointed, as well as to volunteers and other representative of ACORD, but also to ACORD's partners. Conduct towards vulnerable adults outside the work context is also covered by the policy, where it gives rise to concern.

## 2. DEFINITION AND TERMS

Broadly speaking, a vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be, in need of community care services or is resident in a continuing care facility by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness or who is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation

Vulnerable adult abuse is a general term, used about situations where the vulnerable adults may experience harm, usually as the result of failure on the part of the parent or carer to ensure a reasonable standard of care and protection. It may include both actions and omissions on the part of the parent or carer and is normally categorised into five main forms – physical, sexual, financial, psychological abuse, and neglect. It is often the case that a vulnerable adult discovered to be suffering one form of abuse will also be experiencing others.

The following five categories of abuse are universally found. The definitions given, however, are those employed in the UK and are offered here as a starting point and guide for others in exploring the nature that these different forms of abuse take in a local setting:

**Physical abuse** includes hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, undue restraint or inappropriate sanctions. Possible indicators include: multiple bruising, which is not consistent with the explanation given; cowering and flinching; unusually sleepy or docile.

**Financial abuse** includes theft, fraud, pressure around wills, property or inheritance, misuse or misappropriation of benefits. Possible indicators include: unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills; sudden withdrawal of money from accounts; personal possessions going missing.

**Sexual abuse** includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult

has not, or could not, consent and/or was pressured into consenting. Possible indicators include: unexplained and uncharacteristic changes in behaviour; excessive washing; deliberate self-harm.

**Psychological abuse** includes threats of harm or abandonment, humiliation, verbal or racial abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks. Possible indicators include: anxiety, confusion or general resignation; loss of confidence; excessive or inappropriate craving for attention.

**Neglect** includes failure to access medical care or services, failure to give prescribed medication, poor nutrition or lack of heating. Possible indicators include: poor hygiene and cleanliness; repeated infections; reluctant contact with health and social care agencies.

**Vulnerable adults protection** is the term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or to stop vulnerable adults being abused or ill-treated.

When deciding on whether a vulnerable adult has been or is being treated in an abusive or neglectful way, it can be helpful to consider if the vulnerable adult is, as a result, suffering significant harm. The concept of significant harm helps to focus on the likely consequences to the vulnerable adult, and to assess the seriousness of the concerns about the vulnerable adult's safety or welfare. Harm resulting from physical, financial, sexual or psychological abuse, or from neglect, may take the form of impairment of the vulnerable adult's health and development.

The level at which harm to a vulnerable adults is regarded as significant is difficult to define but should nevertheless form the basis of discussions of any concerns. Consideration must be given to the nature of the abuse and the level of concerns that exist, as well as to the context within which the abuse or harm takes place. It is important to discuss all concerns with managers and relevant others in order to assess the levels of risk to vulnerable adults.

### 3. WHAT WILL ACORD DO?

ACORD will meet its commitment to safeguard vulnerable adults through the following means:

- Awareness* Ensuring that all staff and others are aware of the problem of vulnerable adults abuse and the risks to vulnerable adults
- Prevention* Ensuring, through awareness and good practice, that staff and others minimise the risks to vulnerable adults
- Reporting* Ensuring that staff and others are clear what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of vulnerable adults.
- Responding* Ensuring that action is taken to support and protect vulnerable adults where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

In order that the above standards of reporting and responding are met, ACORD will also ensure that it:

- ◆ Takes seriously any concerns raised.
- ◆ Takes positive steps to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults who are the subject of any concerns.
- ◆ Supports vulnerable adults, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns.
- ◆ Acts appropriately and effectively in instigating or cooperating with any subsequent process of investigation.

- ◆ Is guided through the vulnerable adults protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the vulnerable adults'.
- ◆ Listens to and takes seriously the views and wishes of vulnerable adults.
- ◆ Works in partnership with parents/carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults.

#### 4. CODE OF CONDUCT

It is important for all staff, partners and others in contact with vulnerable adults to:

- ◆ Be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these.
- ◆ Plan and organise the work and the workplace so as to minimise risks.
- ◆ As far as possible, be visible in working with vulnerable adults.
- ◆ Ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed.
- ◆ Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged.
- ◆ Talk to vulnerable adults about their contact with staff or others and encourage them to raise any concerns.
- ◆ Empower vulnerable adults – discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.

Staff, partners and others must never:

- ◆ Hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse vulnerable adults.
- ◆ Develop physical/sexual relationship with vulnerable adults.
- ◆ Develop relationships with vulnerable adults which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- ◆ Act in ways that may be abusive or may place a vulnerable adult at risk of abuse.

Staff, partners and others *must* avoid actions or behaviour that could be construed as poor practice or potentially abusive. For example, they should never:

- ◆ Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- ◆ Behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
- ◆ Have a vulnerable adult with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
- ◆ Sleep in the same room or bed as a vulnerable adult with whom they are working.
- ◆ Do things for vulnerable adults of a personal nature that they can do for themselves.
- ◆ Condone, or participate in, behaviour of vulnerable adults which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- ◆ Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade vulnerable adults, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse.
- ◆ Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular vulnerable adults to the exclusion of others.

#### 5. RAISING AND REPORTING CONCERNS IN ACORD

##### THE IMPORTANCE OF RAISING CONCERNS

Vulnerable adult abuse is distressing for all concerned and it is often difficult to accept that it may have occurred, to the point that there is denial or that warning signs are dismissed. The danger is that under-reaction resulting from this lack of acceptance may mean vulnerable adults remain unprotected and exposed to further abuse. If this policy is to achieve its intentions of preventing abuse and protecting vulnerable adults, it is essential that staff and others understand their responsibility to raise any concerns they may have regarding the safety of vulnerable adults.

There are many reasons why staff and others may be reluctant to voice concerns. This reluctance usually stems from anxieties associated with some of the following factors:

- ◆ The person is worried they are mistaken.
- ◆ The person is worried they will not be believed.
- ◆ Even if believed, they may feel there is no specific 'evidence' of abuse.
- ◆ Raising a concern will have serious consequences which will affect the work in general/other colleagues/ACORD.
- ◆ The impact on the vulnerable adult may be a negative/damaging one.
- ◆ The suspected abuser is the vulnerable adult's parent/carer or member of the community for whom there may be serious consequences if abuse is alleged/confirmed.
- ◆ The suspected abuser is the person's line manager/a senior person.
- ◆ The person does not know what the sequence of events might be.
- ◆ A process may be triggered which the person cannot predict or control.
- ◆ The person may fear reprisals or possible victimisation.
- ◆ Reluctance to be involved in the matter beyond raising the concern, e.g. where a prosecution may ensue.
- ◆ A sense of loyalty to a colleague/work friend who may be suspected of abuse.

Concern about 'getting it wrong' is possibly the factor which most inhibits reporting of suspected abuse. However, it is essential where concerns or suspicions do exist, to focus on the welfare of the vulnerable adult(s) involved and to ask 'what if I am right?'. In most incidents of vulnerable adult abuse, it is usually the case that someone other than 'the abused' and 'the abuser' is aware of the situation or at least suspects there is abuse. However, those who know or suspect abuse often do not act, or delay taking action, because of the kind of factors described above. It is also often the case that vulnerable adults who are abused try at some point to tell someone about it.

It is essential that anyone connected to ACORD who suspects or knows of abuse raises their concerns in line with the process described in this document.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

In all matters dealt with as part of this policy, it is essential to respect the need for confidentiality. In certain circumstances, any lack of confidentiality may have devastating effects for the lives of vulnerable adults and may also result in serious consequences for adults involved in the process.

In responding to issues and concerns regarding possible abuse, staff and others must exercise extreme vigilance in protecting information and must pass on this information via the reporting process described in this policy, only to those people who need to be aware of it.

## **7. RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THIS POLICY**

It is the responsibility of all managers to ensure that staff and other for whom they have line-management responsibility are made aware of the policy and that the systems and procedures required to operate the policy effectively are in place. It is the responsibility of all staff to fulfil their part in implementing this policy, particularly by raising awareness if they suspect abuse is taking place.

## 8. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION / HOW TO RAISE CONCERN

