

# A third of elderly patients go hungry

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MORE than a third of vulnerable pensioners are left to go hungry in hospital, according to a study, which warns of "endemic" failures in NHS care of the elderly.

The researchers found that the oldest and weakest patients were the most likely to be let down.

Experts said the findings were "disturbing" and a "sobering" picture of how frail pensioners were treated.

Overall, 38 per cent of those who needed help to eat said they did not always get it. The figure rose among old-

er patients, according to the analysis of official health service data by the London School of Economics.

Among those over the age of 80, 45 per cent in need of assistance with meals were sometimes left without it.

Those who were blind, partially sighted or suffering from deafness were among the most likely to be denied help, with women faring worse than men.

The research, based on a survey of 60,000 hospital inpatients in 2012-13, found that, overall, 23 per cent had experienced poor or inconsistent standards of basic care.

This is equivalent to 2.8 million peo-

23pc

The proportion of 60,000 inpatients surveyed who had experienced poor or inconsistent standards of care

ple annually, including one million pensioners, the LSE said.

In total, 1.3 million patients who needed help eating were left to struggle, or go hungry, the report found.

The LSE said the failings were a "significant problem" affecting the "vast majority" of the country's NHS hospital

trusts. Polly Vizard, of the LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, said: "It's the first time we have analysed an NHS patient survey in such detail and the findings are very disturbing.

"What stands out is not just the large number of patients who say they aren't always being cared for in a dignified way, or being helped to eat, but also that there has been remarkably little change in the percentage of individuals reporting inconsistent and poor standards of care over a substantial period."

Researchers checked hospital surveys going back seven years before coming to the conclusion.

Ms Vizard said the inquiry into the

Mid Staffs scandal had shown the need to listen to those who were being denied basic human needs.

"Our analysis suggests that experiences of poor or inconsistent standards of dignity and help with eating during hospital stays are endemic across the vast majority of trusts," she said.

Caroline Abrahams, Age UK's charity director, said the findings were "sobering" and showed the need for hospitals to redouble their efforts. "It is really worrying that the more vulnerable an older person is, the greater their risk of not being treated as we would all wish for ourselves or our loved ones," she said.