

# Half of care home staff admit to seeing the elderly neglected

**Greg Hurst** Social Affairs Editor

Half of care home staff have witnessed or even been guilty of neglect of elderly residents, a large survey has found.

Making residents wait for care such as help to visit the lavatory was the most common type of neglect, followed by shunning difficult residents and hurrying people through meals.

Although the research found that acts of kindness and care far outweighed instances of neglect, it highlighted a lack of outside trips or activities suited to residents' interests.

The findings are significant because the study is the largest survey of neglect and abuse in care homes in any country, according to researchers at University College London (UCL).

They questioned 1,544 staff working in 92 care homes, asking each if they had seen a range of different types of behaviour, both positive and negative, in the previous three months. The results were published yesterday in PLOS One, a peer-reviewed open access scientific journal.

Instances of abusive behaviour towards residents were low, although researchers said the findings were likely to underestimate such behaviour

because care homes that agreed to take part may have had more open cultures.

It found 5 per cent of carers said they had seen a resident being shouted at, insulted or spoken to harshly and a similar proportion saying a resident had been isolated, while 2 per cent said they were aware of cases in which residents were told they would be sent away.

Only 1 per cent, or 21 care home staff, said they had seen a resident being threatened with physical force, while only one carer reported an incident in which a resident was hit or shaken.

The questionnaires were completed anonymously but researchers reported instances of abuse to the care home concerned, which they said may have deterred some reporting.

Researchers did find more widespread evidence of low-level neglect: 26 per cent of staff had seen people waiting for care, 25 per cent said that staff had avoided residents with challenging behaviour, 19 per cent said that people were not given enough time to eat, 11 per cent said that not enough care was taken when moving residents and 8 per cent said that residents asking for help had been ignored.

Overall 51 per cent of carers had seen some form of abusive or neglectful be-

haviour. This was more common in care homes where staff questionnaires showed a higher level of "burnout".

Claudia Cooper, reader in old age psychiatry at UCL and the lead author, said: "Essentially kind behaviours were common and verbally and physically abusive behaviours were not common, compared to previous research. But what was very prevalent, which is concerning, was where they were omissions of care: people waiting for things or not being taken out for their enjoyment. It wasn't what was happening, it was perhaps what was not happening.

"The fact that this correlated with the levels of carer burnout talks to the fact that perhaps this is about the huge amount of stress that the care home system is under."

The Local Government Association, representing councils who have a duty to ensure care is delivered safely, appealed to residents and relatives to report any form of abuse.

An LGA spokesman said: "Councils take allegations of abuse and neglect extremely seriously and work with local health, care and police partners both to prevent abuse and to ensure the wellbeing of anyone who has been affected."