

Neglect and abuse at nine out of 10 care homes

By Sarah Knapton SCIENCE EDITOR

ABUSE and neglect takes place in nine out of 10 nursing and care homes, an anonymous survey of staff has found.

Researchers at UCL asked more than 1,500 carers at 92 homes across the country to say if they had witnessed, or taken part in, troubling behaviour in the past three months.

In findings described as “worrying”, at least some abuse or neglect was identified in 91 out of the 92 care

homes, and by more than half of respondents.

More than a quarter of staff said they or colleagues sometimes made residents wait for care, while one in five said residents were not given enough time to eat food. Verbal abuse was reported by 5 per cent of respondents, and physical abuse by 1 per cent.

The authors of the report, published in the journal *PLOS One*, said the findings were probably just the “tip of the iceberg” because of under-reporting

and fears of reprisals. They also warned that the abusive behaviour was worse when homes were understaffed and carers reported feeling burned out. The odds of poor behaviour being reported rose by 19 per cent when staff felt overworked and stressed.

Dr Claudia Cooper, of UCL Psychiatry, the study’s lead author, said: “We found low rates of verbal and physical abuse; the abusive behaviours reported were largely matters of neglect.

“These behaviours were most com-

mon in care homes that also had high rates of staff burnout, which suggests it’s a consequence of staff who are under pressure and unable to provide the level of care they would like to offer.”

Although staff reported a great deal of positive behaviour as well, they found there was often an absence of beneficial practices. For example, more than one in three care home staff were rarely aware of a resident being taken outside of the home for their enjoyment, and 15 per cent said activities

were almost never planned around a resident’s interests. And nearly one in five said they never spoke to residents nicely when giving personal care.

The study is part of the UCL Marquee cohort study, which is also looking into interventions to improve care for people with dementia.

More than two thirds of care home residents have dementia, Department of Health statistics show. Agitated behaviours such as pacing, shouting or lashing out are more common in de-

mentia, and can make provision of care challenging to deliver, often with minimal training and limited resources.

Dr Doug Brown, chief policy and research officer at the Alzheimer’s Society, said: “Seventy per cent of people living in care homes have dementia, and it’s clear from these findings that they’re bearing the brunt of a chronically underfunded social care system. It’s upsetting but unsurprising that abusive behaviours were more common in homes with higher staff burnout.”